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**ANARCHIST HETEROTOPIAS:
POST-1968 LIBERTARIAN COMMUNITIES
IN BRITAIN AND ITALY**

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Birkbeck, University of London

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Statement of originality

I, Luca Lapolla, confirm that the research included within this thesis is my own work. Previously published material is acknowledged below.

I attest that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not, to the best of my knowledge, break any UK law, infringe any third party's copyright or other Intellectual Property Right.

Luca Lapolla

16 October 2017

Acknowledgments

Doing a PhD can often feel like a solitary voyage through uncharted waters, or through uncharted communities, as in my case. Throughout my journey, though, I have encountered many people who have helped me in lots of different ways. This thesis would simply not exist without their suggestions, words of encouragement, and stimulating discussions. Thanking them all here is the least I could do. Although some of them would probably prefer a pint.

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My thanks are also due to my interviewees. They decided to believe in my project and to trust me with their life stories and personal views. They welcomed me in their homes, met me in public places, and in occupied spaces. And sometimes they never showed up. When they did, though, they shared their time and private memories with me. Those memories were sometimes happy and others sad, but they were all intimate episodes of somebody else's unique journey on this planet. Talking about one's own past is something most people would normally struggle with, so I particularly appreciated the involvement of activists in these times of undercover police and state repression. In fact, I also respect the decision of those who preferred not to take part in this research, and hope that this thesis might persuade them to participate in future projects. Hopefully, some parts of this work will also provide other libertarian communities a starting point to reflect on their own political experience and inform their activism.

I want finally to say thank you to my friends and family. They incited me throughout my research journey with their skilful combination of unconditional support and impatient questions like: 'Have you finished yet?'. But this has been a personal journey as well, and knowing that they were always by my side (whether in Britain or Italy) helped me through some difficult periods. As an anarchist community cannot survive without a radical network of activists and other communities, so would I have not gotten this far without my own transnational network of mates and kin. That and Italian comfort food.

Abstract

This thesis explores libertarian and anarchist communities – such as social centres, squats, and communes – in the UK and Italy since 1968. It shows how they relate and contribute to wider Left and social movements, despite being often overlooked by historians. Such places functioned as gateways into activism for ‘ordinary people’ and as catalysts to action for existing activists. They have provided a space to experiment and implement radical social alternatives to the *status quo*. These communities also facilitated the transmission of intergenerational radical memories and traditions. Like Foucauldian heterotopias, such ‘counter-sites’ simultaneously ‘represented, contested, and inverted’ the expressions of the dominant cultures. To explore the effects of this simultaneous replication and inversion of the *status quo*, this dissertation draws on interviews I have conducted with libertarians involved in these communities. They enable a critical appraisal of the tension between theoretical and actual communities, and of the persistence of mainstream ideas and power relations within these spaces. In particular, this work investigates the variations in the attitude of libertarian activists towards key facets in the life of their communities. I focus especially on the influence space/place and activists have on each other; the perception of time and preservation of collective memory; and the construction of identities and emergence of power relations.

The period covered allows for an analysis of experiences of a new type of libertarianism – influenced by (and influencing) countercultures and new social movements. By comparing British and Italian communities within this time and with precedent cases, the dissertation illustrates how different historical and spatial contexts inflect experiences of community living and participation. It thus challenges widespread assumptions inside both the mainstream and the libertarian movement (as well as the cohesiveness of such constructs) and sheds light on the changes and continuities in the life of libertarians within and beyond such communities.

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List of acronyms

ASS: Advisory Service for Squatters

CdQ: Comitato di Quartiere (neighbourhood committee)

CND: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

CNT: Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour)

CPGB: Communist Party of Great Britain

CSA: Centro Sociale Autogestito (Self-managed Social Centre)

CSOA: Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito (Self-managed Occupied Social Centre)

EF!: Earth First!

FAI: Federazione Anarchica Italiana (Italian Anarchist Federation)

FOE: Friends of the Earth

GLC: Greater London Council

GLF: Gay Liberation Front

IWA: International Workingmen's Association

MSFS: Movimento Studenti Fuori Sede (Non-residential Students' Movement)

OAP: Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese (Apulian Anarchist Organisation)

ORA: Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica (Anarchist Revolutionary Organisation)

PCI: Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)

PSI: Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party)

RTS: Reclaim The Streets

TAZ: Temporary Autonomous Zone

USI: Unione Sindacale Italiana (Italian Syndicalist Union)

WLM: Women's Liberation Movement

Introduction

The aim of Kebele [social centre in Bristol] is to provide a living example of anarchist politics in action. Hence the horizontal organisational structure, the fact that everyone has an equal saying in stuff. It tries to provide an example of ‘here we are, we’re doing this for nothing, we do it together’. ... Our long-term aim is to achieve some sort of social revolution – the overthrow of capital and the state. This struggle has been going on for hundreds of years, and this place has been here twenty years and it’s reasonably well-accepted.¹

The story of Kebele challenges the common misconception of social centres as essentially transitory experiments. In fact, Tim’s statement suggests that it might be useful to think of libertarian communities in both historical and spatial terms. Kebele is an anarchist social centre that operates in the present (‘here we are, we’re doing this for nothing, we do it together’), and has ambitions for the future (‘Our long-term aim is to achieve some sort of social revolution – the overthrow of capital and the state’). However, Tim suggests it also has a past that is rooted in wider radical histories (‘This struggle has been going on for hundreds of years, and this place has been here twenty years’) and in Bristol immediate neighbourhood. The space-time dimension is central to my research, as I investigate examples of what Colin Ward called ‘anarchy in action’ – anarchism rooted in everyday experience.² In particular, I look at libertarian communities from the past five decades, and from two countries – Britain and Italy – whose libertarian and radical movements present divergent but interconnected histories. It shows how libertarian communities changed across time and space, as they interacted dialectically with different contexts and anarchist ideas. While previous academic works focused either on one case study or on a single type of community – like social centres – this thesis combines spatial-temporal cross-comparisons. It also focuses innovatively on everyday experiences, and how libertarians articulated them, by using oral history.

I organised those experiences around five main research areas that emerged as I observed and talked with people involved in libertarian communities – social centres, squats, rural communes. To facilitate the comparisons throughout my research, I have structured my thesis in five thematic chapters. These are preceded by this Introduction which, besides outlining key themes and research methods, clarifies problematic terms. It also provides a framework for the following analyses by retracing the history of communitarian anarchism and its relationship with ‘classical’ anarchist movements in Britain and Italy (1860s-1940s). Chapter One investigates the function of post-1968 libertarian communities within the wider radical scene of Britain and Italy, and crucially compares them with the ‘classical’ scenario. In Chapter Two, I look at the interaction between space/place and libertarian communities by focusing especially on two urban case studies

¹ Tim, Interview on Kebele, 8 March 2015.

² Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1996).

(one British, one Italian), and one rural commune. Chapter Three studies the relationship between libertarians and time – how living in communities affects their perception of it, and how they relate to their historical memory. Chapter Four explores the tension between theory and practice, as gender, ethnic and class-based privileges can survive under various forms in libertarian communities. Chapter Five researches the variations in the political identity of libertarians across different time periods and spaces. Overall, my thesis will provide a grounded understanding of the ways in which anarchism has played out in particular ways in different temporal and spatial contexts, and challenge ideas of libertarian community.

1. Methodology

The Introduction and Chapter One are fundamental as they ground my research in the history of libertarian communities and of anarchism, but they present a different scale of analysis and tone than the following chapters. They focus on a broader context compared to my investigation in the other chapters, which is more focused and anchored in particular communities. By drawing mainly on the existing literature, they also lack the individual voices that make up the everyday practices of anarchism, which are at the centre of the other chapters. To contextualise my case studies, I used secondary and tertiary written sources, whereas I retraced their experiences using primary sources – interviews, but also the libertarian press. I examined in particular issues of anarchist periodicals such as *Volontà*, *A-Rivista*, *Black Flag* and *Freedom* from archives like 56A in London and Pinelli in Milan; copyleft publications and websites of squatters and social centres on the internet like SqEK and Kebele; as well as leaflets and other documents provided by the interviewees. The interviews gathered the voices of 56 participants across the variety of communities which I investigated for this thesis.³ Precise figures are impossible because of the fluidity that characterises the libertarian scene, especially with regards to squats. But they were located within the Italian cities of Bari and Milan, the British cities of Bristol and London, and also from rural Apulia (southern Italy).

The choice of studying communities from Britain and Italy came naturally, as I sought to compare case studies from countries whose libertarian movements had a contrasting history. Britain and Italy immediately emerged as the ideal candidates. Sociologist Christopher Rootes underlined how, in Britain, the uninterrupted survival of its key institutions from the seventeenth century has ensured ‘the continual loyalty of citizens to the state’.⁴ Hence, despite its strong liberal tradition and Protestant background that celebrate freedom and suspicion of authorities, Britain fostered a culturally influential libertarianism, but a marginal anarchist movement.⁵ In Italy, meanwhile, a repressive conservative state coexisted with the biggest communist party in the

³ Ten of these interviews were already part of my project on a 1970s anarchist communist collective from Bari: Luca Lapolla, *Gli anarchici di piazza Umberto. La sinistra libertaria a Bari negli anni Settanta*. (Fano: Alternativa Libertaria, 2011).

⁴ Christopher Rootes, ‘The Resurgence of Protest and the Revitalization of Democracy in Britain’, in *Social Movements and Democracy*, ed. Pedro Ibarra (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 137.

⁵ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible. A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 163, 487–88.

western world, whose deep-rooted social and cultural presence had been legitimised by the anti-fascist resistance during the Second World War. In this bipolarised situation, the Old Left exercised a strong influence on the Italian social movements.⁶ As a consequence or reaction to these and other distinct national characteristics, post-1968 British and Italian anarchism evolved along two different paths: the former developed as a mainly (counter)cultural phenomenon, whilst the latter was principally a political movement. Britain was thus a reference point for European countercultures and social movements, from New Left and CND to gay liberation and punk movements. In contrast, historians Jan Kurz and Marica Tolomelli underlined the importance of Italian post-1968 political history, which generated one of the most active and varied extra-parliamentary Lefts.⁷ Transcending national divides, British and Italian libertarians often developed relations on a personal and communitarian level in the post-1968 radical scene.

My use of oral history was essential to explore these relations and the everyday experiences of libertarians, whose anecdotes and points of view help us understand their perception of the world, but also their relationship with other radicals and the so-called mainstream. For instance, when I interviewed Thea from Urupia rural commune, she recounted a funny episode that well represented the mutual miscomprehensions often existing between libertarian communities and the ‘outer world’. She remembered being asked by local policemen, whilst running errands in the nearby village, ‘how ... the youths [at the community were] behaving’.⁸ Now, let us bear in mind that to many inhabitants of an impoverished and traditionalist south Italian village most Urupia communards must look shabby, and living in a farm must not seem a choice a young person would make. In addition, comunità (community) is also the short form for ‘rehabilitation centre’ in Italian. Hence, those policemen had probably taken Thea for a ‘rehab supervisor’, since they had applied familiar ‘categories’ to try to decode an unknown reality.

To further enhance the evocative power of oral sources, I adopted anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s ‘thick descriptions’ that, by using individual perspectives and accounts of everyday life, when carefully contextualised, explain wider contexts and reveal deeper meanings.⁹ Interviews also enabled me to embrace the three key aspects identified by cultural historian Anna Green: ‘the focus upon human subjectivity; a holistic approach to culture that seeks to identify the unifying structures, patterns, or systems that connect the whole; and an interpretive, hermeneutic approach’.¹⁰ However, they also raised a number of methodological issues.¹¹ This section

⁶ Donatella Della Porta, ‘Social Movements and Democracy at the Turn of the Millennium: The Italian Case’, in *Social Movements and Democracy*, ed. Pedro Ibarra (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 113–15.

⁷ Jan Kurz and Marica Tolomelli, ‘Protest Histories in Different European Countries: Italy’, in *1968 in Europe*, ed. Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 83.

⁸ Thea, Interview on Urupia, 6 August 2014.

⁹ For Geertz’s essay ‘Thick description: toward an interpretative theory of culture’, see: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3–30.

¹⁰ Anna Green, *Cultural History* (London-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 10.

¹¹ David King Dunaway and Willa K Baum, eds., *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd ed., American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Walnut Creek, Calif; London: AltaMira Press, 1996), 391–406.

investigates three overarching methodological issues – representativeness, reliability and loss of memory – often used to discredit oral history, while I will discuss specific issues as I move through the thesis.

The first methodological problem I had to face when I started my research journey was the idea of representativeness. Initially, I naively sought to include eight case studies – two urban and two rural from each country – each representing a national tendency across a temporal phase. After struggling to find available communities, I realised that each libertarian experiment is a peculiar combination of ideas and practices typical of the space-time in which they exist. Hence, the very concept of representativeness makes no sense when talking of libertarian communities. I therefore selected my case studies starting from my previous knowledge on the topic, and integrated it with the literature and suggestions from people currently or previously involved in anarchism or communitarian experiments.¹² Rather than being representative, each case study and each testimony has its own ‘intrinsic validity’ because every experience tells something unique about broader historical processes.¹³ I decided thus to follow Matt Cook’s method, who – in his research on 1970s Brixton gay squats saw the relationship between ‘the bigger and smaller pictures’ as ‘symbiotic’: ‘both are crucial to understanding ... identities, and communities’, he wrote.¹⁴ Similarly, my analyses set case studies and interviews against their contemporary contexts to shed light on the individual experiences, but also to suggest broader tendencies and processes.

The help of people involved in libertarian communities was also vital to find interviewees, as they ‘vouched’ for me. Many activists reacted to years of state repression and undercover surveillance operations by developing a deeply-rooted distrust and suspicion: ‘We need to protect ourselves from infiltrators, tell-tales [and] journalists’, said one.¹⁵ Exemplary was the case of undercover officer Mark Kennedy in Britain between 2003 and 2010, which came up often – even just as a joke – whenever I asked interviewees for their permission to record.¹⁶ Other times, the interviewees jokingly said I would surely misquote them, as they claimed that was what journalists did with them. To overcome any residual tension, I stressed to establish a sympathetic and collaborative relationship with the informants. I based my interviews on a list of bullet points (in Appendix), as suggested by sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann, which allowed me to be

¹² My previous research experience on an anarchist group involved in communitarian experiences in 1970s southern Italy was a helpful starting point for my current research. For more information: Lapolla, *Gli anarchici di piazza Umberto. La sinistra libertaria a Bari negli anni Settanta*.

¹³ Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 83.

¹⁴ Matt Cook, “‘Gay Times’: Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970’s London”, *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 1 (2013): 109.

¹⁵ Francesco and Ruggiero, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata, 17 August 2014.

¹⁶ For more information on the Kennedy case: Rob Evans and Paul Lewis, ‘Undercover Officer Spied on Green Activists’, the Guardian, accessed 1 March 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/jan/09/undercover-office-green-activists>; Lisa Jones and Kate Wilson, ‘Relationships with Undercover Officers Wreck Lives. The Lies Must Stop’, *The Guardian*, 28 July 2015, sec. Comment is free, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/28/relationships-undercover-officers-lies-mark-kennedy-police>.

flexible during the interview and establish an informal atmosphere.¹⁷ Such bullet points changed progressively, as I critically reflected on the findings of previous interviews and on the field notes I took during or immediately after my visits to the communities. Nonetheless, the atmosphere remained tense during some interviews. For instance, when I was invited to attend an internal assembly at Ex-Caserma Liberata social centre in Bari, I noticed that the members used a sort of semi-serious code to communicate. I asked them if they wanted me to leave but they explained that the reason for that behaviour was that they believed the police had tapped them. They claimed they had received a full transcript of a previous activist-only meeting. Even though I could not verify this episode, the group visibly felt they were under siege. To reassure them and all my other interviewees, I anonymised their recordings, and always gave them the opportunity to choose a pseudonym and to withdraw at any point part or the totality of their interview from my research. Although nobody asked to withdraw, many chose to use pseudonyms – especially if still politically active – and somebody asked me to keep some illegal actions out of my thesis. This differs from the civil rights activists of Kim Lacy Roberts’ oral history project, who proudly used their own names since their battles had been won, and they feared no state repression anymore.¹⁸

Having managed to overcome the reluctance or distrust of my interviewees, two more methodological issues threatened my research – the possible loss of memory and reliability of my interviewees. Oral historian Paul Thompson used data from previous studies to demonstrate that ‘no significant loss’ of memory occurs between nine months and the next 47 years after an event. Also, an important role is played by the interest of a person in the event.¹⁹ With regards to the reliability of oral sources, I generally preferred to interview people individually because I was aware of the possibility for informers to omit or exaggerate certain memories in order to preserve their public image.²⁰ I made exceptions in cases of distrustful or insecure informants. For instance, Juax from Ex-Caserma Liberata overcame his reluctance to interviews when I started to talk to him while surrounded by his comrades. This allowed him to feel confident and in control.²¹ In such cases, though, I also noted that the presence of other people involved in the same movements or communities helped interviewees retrieve lost memories or correct them. On one occasion, an activist was struggling with the date of a political event, and her partner helped her by linking it

¹⁷ This method stands halfway between the strictly structured sociological questionnaire and the completely unstructured interview, in which conversation follows the direction given by the informant. Flexibility was the keyword of my method, as I kept my list of bullet points open to modifications, depending on what emerged from previous interviews, and I avoided pre-determined ‘strategies for a successful interview’. For more details: Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'intervista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

¹⁸ Kim Lacy Rogers, ‘Memory, Struggle and Power: On Interviewing Political Activists’, *The Oral History Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 165–84.

¹⁹ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108.

²⁰ Lummis, *Listening to History*, 64.

²¹ Juax kept finding excuses to avoid me, until an old friend of his revealed to me that he was probably uncomfortable with remembering a period, the late 1970s, populated by many of his friends who did not survive the 1980s and 1990s heroin epidemic. In addition, he tended to diminish his importance and ashamedly claimed he was ‘no good at speaking’. But when I started asking questions in the busy courtyard of Ex-Caserma Liberata that he habitually frequented, his anxiety slowly disappeared as he felt in control of what he now perceived as an informal chat surrounded by trustworthy comrades. Clearly, Juax’s answers might have been influenced by the presence of other people, but forcing him in an isolated room might have made him answer in monosyllables. Juax, Interview on Giungla, 2 February 2015.

to a personal episode.²² I also encouraged my interviewees to refresh their memory by writing notes or going through old documents before the interview, as suggested by various oral historians.²³ Another strategy I adopted to ensure the reliability of the information emerging from my interviews was asking interviewees to clarify memories that seemed inaccurate.²⁴ This reminded me of Alessandro Portelli's statement about informant and historian 'bring[ing] to the interview an agenda of their own, which is constantly renegotiated in the course of the conversation'.²⁵ The importance of the dialogic dimension in interviews became immediately evident to me, since oral history – unlike more traditional methods – offers the unique chance to interact with the sources.

Other times, however, I triangulated the information *after* the interview by checking it against what emerged from other interviews or written sources.²⁶ This takes me to the importance of the post-interview analytical phase. In fact, essential for a successful interview is the careful planning and active presence of the historian in all of its phases – before, during, and after the interview.²⁷ False memories threatened the reliability and accuracy of my material, if undetected. Yet, lies and misremembering – as well as silences – are important because oral history 'tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*'.²⁸ For this reason, Portelli also stated that oral historians 'do only half their job if they concentrate on what people say and ignore how it is said'. He referred in particular to the fact that 'accents' and register too carry meaning, such as indications on the interviewee's class background.²⁹ For my analyses, I took all these linguistic elements into consideration. However, I had to translate into English all my interviews to Italian libertarians in order to make them accessible to an English-speaking public. This process inevitably cancelled all traces of regional varieties and dialects. I tried nonetheless to render the difference between standard Italian and slang expressions and, when necessary, I added explanatory comments. Flexibility has been a constant throughout my research journey. In fact, I discovered that a project of oral history – and especially one involving anarchists – depends on factors that often make the methodology quite accidental. Despite all these difficulties and challenges, oral history still enabled me to base my research on unique material that sheds light on post-1968 British and Italian libertarian communities.

²² Gaia, Interview on Libera, 22 July 2014.

²³ Dunaway and Baum, *Oral History*, 99–104.

²⁴ Dunaway and Baum, 87–92; Lummis, *Listening to History*, 68.

²⁵ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, Wis; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 10.

²⁶ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 134.

²⁷ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), 56.

²⁸ Portelli, 50–53; On this, see also: Penny Summerfield, 'Oral History as a Research Method', in *Research Methods for English Studies*, ed. Gabriele Griffin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 47–66.

²⁹ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 86, 87.

2. A new perspective on libertarian communities

2.1 ‘Anarchy is Order’: Clarifying the terminology

This is a project about anarchism and libertarianism but over the course of my research I found out just how those terms vary. In fact, throughout this thesis there is a series of key recurring terms and concepts – such as heterotopias, libertarian communities or anarchism – that need to be contextualised and clarified. I will do so here beginning with ‘heterotopias’, which I use as a synonym for libertarian communities. Foucault coined the term to define those places ‘which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites ... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’.³⁰ Although he identified two types of heterotopias – of crisis (‘privileged or sacred or forbidden places’) and of deviation (where people with deviant behaviour are placed, like prisons) – I see libertarian communities as a form of voluntary heterotopia. In fact, I focus especially on places that represent, contest and invert the mainstream – a term that I use throughout my thesis to indicate the ideas and activities regarded by most people as the norm. Such places – like libertarian communities – are places created by people whose political ideas deviate from the norm.

The Anarchist FAQ – a working group of anarchists who created a series of questions and answers on anarchism and its history – demonstrated that since the nineteenth century ‘libertarian’ and ‘anarchist’ have often been used as synonyms.³¹ Historian David Goodway confirmed this tendency, as he saw in this ‘an attempt [of anarchists] to distance themselves from the negative connotations of ‘anarchy’ and its derivatives’ by choosing a ‘less emotive term’ like ‘libertarianism’.³² To be precise, though, the terms ‘anarchist’ and ‘libertarian’ stand in a relationship of hyperonymy-hyponymy, as “‘libertarian’ has been used by more people than just anarchists, but always to describe socialist ideas close to anarchism’.³³

What is anarchism, though? The vast literature on the topic shows a multitude of approaches ranging from a minimalist to a traditionalist definition.³⁴ The former would include free-market capitalists, who started calling themselves ‘libertarians’ or ‘anarcho-capitalists’ around the 1970s, just because they opposed state organisation. However, to quote the anarchist scholar John Clark, ‘any definition which reduces anarchism to a single dimension, such as its

³⁰ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, October 1984, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.

³¹ The Anarchist FAQ Editorial Collective, ‘150 Years of Libertarian’, The Anarchist Library, accessed 12 March 2014, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/the-anarchist-faq-editorial-collective-150-years-of-libertarian>.

³² David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 4, 1.

³³ The Anarchist FAQ Editorial Collective, ‘150 Years of Libertarian’. In North America, however, there is a tendency to use ‘libertarian’ as a synonym of ‘anarcho-capitalist’.

³⁴ For a partial selection of the ways in which ‘anarchism’ can be defined, see: J Roland Pennock and John W Chapman (John Chapman, eds., *Anarchism* (New York: New York University Press, 1978); Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner’s Guide*, Rev. ed., (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: Meridian Books Cleveland, 1962); Paul McLaughlin, *Anarchism and Authority: A Philosophical Introduction to Classical Anarchism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Beth Hartung, ‘Anarchism And The Problem Of Order’, *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 8, no. 1 (1983): 83–101; Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna, eds., *Anarchism and Utopianism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, vol. 1 (Oakland-Edinburgh: Ak Press, 2009).

critical element, ... must be judged seriously inadequate'.³⁵ For this reason, throughout my thesis I adopt the definition of anarchism provided by Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt: 'anarchism is a revolutionary and libertarian socialist doctrine'. They explain that through 'advocating individual freedom through a free society, anarchism aims to create a democratic, egalitarian, and stateless socialist order through an international and internationalist social revolution, abolishing capitalism, landlordism, and the state'.³⁶ This places anarchism, as Carl Levy noted, definitely within the wider tradition of the socialist and labour movements from the nineteenth century onwards, as he defined it as 'the product of the era of the First International (1864-1876) and the Paris Commune (1871)'.³⁷

2.2 'Anarchy in action': Why do post-1968 libertarian communities matter?

Libertarian communities have received attention from a number of quarters. Journalists, academics, activists and communards – like Chris Coates, author of the seminal *Communes Britannica* – have sought to investigate their often invisible worlds 'to bring that history out from the sidelines and ... into the footlights and shine a light on it'.³⁸ Lively debates periodically break out among anarchists over their function within anarchism's broader radical aims, with some cynically reducing urban communities to 'a tax-free disco ... aiming to make people waste their time' while others positioned them as 'a [cultural] reference point in the neighbourhood'. Similarly contested have been the place of rural communities within libertarianism, which have been described both as 'useless amateur experiments of monastic and elitist socialism' or 'political project[s] of social transformation'.³⁹ Anarchist publications, like the British *Anarchy* and the Italian *A-Rivista*, included articles exploring such libertarian communities in depth.⁴⁰ However, to date these attempts have focused on a single type of community (either urban or rural), on a specific national context or on a particular case-study.⁴¹ In addition, their works – like in the case of political scientist Michael Taylor – mostly aimed to find out if a truly libertarian community was possible within a capitalist state.⁴² By investigating post-1968 libertarian communities of Britain and Italy, my objectives are different. I explore the role of libertarian

³⁵ McLaughlin, *Anarchism and Authority*, 25.

³⁶ van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, 1:33.

³⁷ Carl Levy, 'Social Histories of Anarchism', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 4, no. 2 (2010): 10. The First International, or International Workingmen's Association, was a federation of workers' groups that aimed to unite European Left-wing groups and union organisations. The Paris Commune was the revolutionary government of

³⁸ Chris Coates, *Communes Britannica* (London: Diggers And Dreamers Publications, 2012), 5.

³⁹ Gino Ancona, Interview on post-1968 anarchism in Italy, 13 August 2015; Raúl Zecca Castel, 'Quelli Della Cecilia', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, March 2010, <http://www.arivista.org/?nr=351&pag=91.htm>; Agostino Manni, 'Report on Urupia's Economic Situation', 8 May 2014.

⁴⁰ Examples are *Anarchy's* issue on Squatting and *A-Rivista's* dossier on rural communes. Colin Ward, ed., 'Anarchy 102. Squatters', *Anarchy* 9, no. 8 (August 1969); Fausta Bizzozzero and Massimo Panizza, 'Arcobaleno Comuni', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, July 1985.

⁴¹ Examples I will draw on in my thesis are: Consorzio Aaster et al., *Centri Sociali: Geografie Del Desiderio* (Shake Edizioni Underground, 1996); Coates, *Communes Britannica*; Andrew Rigby, *Communes in Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); Francesco Adinolfi et al., *Comunità Virtuali. I Centri Sociali In Italia* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1994); Squatting Europe Kollektive, ed., *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles* (Wivenhoe / New York / Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013); Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar, eds., *Squatting. The Real Story* (London: Bay Leaf, 1980); Giuseppe Aiello, *Urupia* (Napoli: Candilata, 2012).

⁴² Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy and Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.

communities within the wider radical movement, the influence of place/space and the function of time and memory in their everyday life, the tension between theoretical and actual communities, and the variations in the political identity of libertarians.

Far from being a post-1968 novelty, libertarian/anarchistic principles – such as direct democracy, self-management and mutual aid – have appeared in different periods and civilisations. Historians of anarchism often cite Taoism, early Christians, the Diggers, and Enlightenment philosophers as some of the forerunners of anarchism. However, dominant institutions and the mainstream generally prevailed by repressing those concepts and their realisation.⁴³ In his introduction to *Demanding the impossible: A history of anarchism*, Peter Marshall remembered early-1960s scholars' consensus on the death of the anarchist movement.⁴⁴ Then came 1968 which proved them wrong: anarchism had begun to revive as part of the 1960s north American and European countercultures when intellectuals and students re-discovered and experimented with forms of Left libertarianism.⁴⁵ Composed mainly of young people, 1960s countercultural groups sometimes developed into social movements, with anthropologist David Graeber's claiming that 'anarchist-inspired movements are growing everywhere'.⁴⁶ Since then, we have seen different dynamic expressions of the relation between anarchism, countercultures and social movements. Indeed historian Alastair J. Reid argued that, rather than the New Left, *anarchism* should be considered as the real political expression of the counterculture. Nonetheless, many historians and social scientists still overlook the contribution of anarchism to broader post-1968 Left and social movements. For instance, historian Geoff Eley simply excluded anarchism from his history of the European Left, whereas Donatella Della Porta, Mario Diani and Tilly – sociologists and experts of social movements – mainly mention anarchists as violent protesters.⁴⁷ My research intends instead to finally shed light on the important contribution of anarchism to post-1968 radical Left and social movements. It focuses especially on social anarchism in the form of libertarian communities, as opposed to individualist and insurrectionist anarchism.⁴⁸

⁴³ Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible. A History of Anarchism*, 53–139.

⁴⁴ Marshall, xi.

⁴⁵ Marshall, 539–46.

⁴⁶ Alastair J. Reid, 'The Dialectics of Liberation: The Old Left, the New Left and the Counter-Culture', in *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History / Edited by David Feldman and Jon Lawrence.*, ed. David Feldman and Jon Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 272; David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2004), 2, http://www.eleuthera.it/files/materiali/David_Graeber_Fragments_%20Anarchist_Anthropology.pdf. Charles Tilly described social movements as those movements challenging the 'powerholders by means of repeated public displays' in the name of a population. Charles Tilly, 'When Do (and Don't) Social Movements Promote Democratization?', in *Social Movements and Democracy*, ed. Pedro Ibarra (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 23.

⁴⁷ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements. An Introduction*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 164, 190, 239; Tilly, 'When Do (and Don't) Social Movements Promote Democratization?', 23.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed analysis of social anarchism, see: Giovanni Baldelli, *Social Anarchism* (London: Penguin, 1972); Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh, San Francisco: Ak Press, 1995).

3. Theorised communities: from ‘paradise lost’ to confederated eco-communities

3.1 Mainstream ideas of ‘community’

In order to understand and reflect on the shifting tensions between theoretical and actualised libertarian communities, I want first to explore the changes in the idea of community. This provides a crucial background to the more grounded investigation of the communities themselves in the chapters that follow. The concept of ‘community’ is contested and depends on different social, political and even linguistic interpretations. Citizens, academics and governments have become increasingly interested in the idea of community in a broad sense. According to Zygmunt Bauman, people intend communities today as a synonym for ‘paradise lost – but one we dearly hope to return [to to gain safety]’.⁴⁹ Gerard Delanty highlighted that this led to a narrative of ‘Golden Age’, a sense of nostalgia ‘for an irretrievable past which is irrecoverable because it may have never existed in the first place’.⁵⁰ He also explained this as ‘a response to the crisis in solidarity and belonging that has been exacerbated and at the same time induced by globalization’.⁵¹ However, governments found a way to take advantage of this situation. For instance, geographer Ben Rogaly and historian Becky Taylor claim that the use of ‘community’ has become a ‘governmentalized discourse’ aiming at softening the move towards neo-capitalist restructuring.⁵² In addition, scholar Coretta Phillips exemplified this tendency by mentioning the New Labour governments’ (1997-2010) strategy to propagandise ‘community cohesion’ in order to overcome the recurrent ‘racialized confrontations’ that fed on divisive ethnic-religious identities.⁵³ The British government even established a Department for Communities and Local Government in 2006, whose ‘job [was] to create great places to live and work, and to give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area’. They claimed to do so by ‘supporting local government[s]’.⁵⁴

Academia had its share of responsibility for the widespread post-war image of communities as ‘a solid, bounded set of social relationships, located in one place’.⁵⁵ The 1957 seminal work by Michael Young and Peter Willmott on *Family and kinship in East London* was fundamental in creating the myth of working-class areas as organic ‘communities’ that needed protection from post-war housing policies.⁵⁶ Recently, Jon Lawrence has debunked that myth by demonstrating they had ignored testimonies contrasting with the authors’ *a priori* thesis. Their progressive political agenda meant they saw ‘the dense networks of kinship and neighbourliness

⁴⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Themes for the 21st Century (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 3.

⁵⁰ Gerard Delanty, *Community*, 2nd ed., Key Ideas (London-New York: Routledge, 2010), 151; Margaret Wetherell, Michelynn Laflèche, and Robert Berkeley, eds., *Identity, Ethnic Diversity and Community Cohesion* (London: Sage, 2007), 99.

⁵¹ Delanty, *Community*, x.

⁵² Wetherell, Laflèche, and Berkeley, *Identity, Ethnic Diversity and Community Cohesion*, 62.

⁵³ Wetherell, Laflèche, and Berkeley, 75.

⁵⁴ ‘About - Department for Communities and Local Government - GOV.UK’, accessed 12 September 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments-for-communities-and-local-government/about>.

⁵⁵ Wetherell, Laflèche, and Berkeley, *Identity, Ethnic Diversity and Community Cohesion*, 72.

⁵⁶ Michael Dunlop Young, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957).

... as the building blocks for a more mutualistic socialism'. Hence, they presented 'the extended family as lynchpin of an organic, self-servicing working-class community – a community which they hoped might yet provide the basis for an alternative, less Statist, model for British social democracy. But filtering out these voices created a myth of working-class community'.⁵⁷ However, Delanty noticed a new trend among academics influenced by the cultural turn of 1980s and 1990s. Mirroring the changes occurring in the social sciences, the perception of communities in academia shifted from 'a form of social interaction based on locality to a concern with meaning and identity'.⁵⁸ According to Bauman, identities have become so important in our fragmented world of vulnerable individuals because, just like communities, they provide 'a cosy shelter of security and confidence'.⁵⁹ This resonates with political scientist Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities'.⁶⁰

Gender scholar Miranda Joseph states that communities based on collective identities – like nationalism, ethnicity, gender or religion – are 'inevitably ... constituted in relation to internal and external enemies'.⁶¹ This is particularly true for the identity-based communities that formed in the wake of the politically-aware countercultures of 1960s and 1970s. The new social movements of those years, 'such as feminism, ... the ecological movement, gay rights movements, ... made collective identity central to their politics' and revisited the idea of 'community in term of political consciousness and collective action [where] the emphasis is on the collective "we" opposing injustice'.⁶² Hence, while citizens and governments have often constructed the idea of community as a generally positive and reassuring term, academics have focused on its identity-related and postmodern aspects.

3.2 Libertarian ideas of 'community'

Historically, many intellectuals and activists have constructed different ideas of community. They mostly reflected on the forms an alternative community could or should have, and often proposed model communities such as Charles Fourier's blueprint for the Phalanstery.⁶³ It was with Fourier and the other so-called 'utopian socialists', like Henri de Saint-Simon and Robert Owen, that a part of the early-nineteenth century Left enthusiastically embraced the idea of experimenting on a small scale what a socialist society should look like. However, other radicals criticised the revolutionary role of such experiments, which posed no actual threat to the *status quo*. German

⁵⁷ Jon Lawrence, 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class": A Re-Analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's Family and Kinship in East London', *The Historical Journal* 59, no. 2 (2016): 570, 572, 575.

⁵⁸ Delanty, *Community*, xi.

⁵⁹ Bauman, *Community*, 15, 16.

⁶⁰ Anderson stated, for example, that nations are 'imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Second edition (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 7.

⁶¹ Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xix.

⁶² Delanty, *Community*, 94, xii–xiii.

⁶³ Charles Fourier, 'The Phalanstery', accessed 20 June 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/fourier/works/ch20.htm>.

philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels opposed their ‘scientific socialism’ to communitarian projects, which they deemed as ‘phantasies’ based on ‘a mish-mash of ... economic theories [and] pictures of future society’.⁶⁴ Marx believed that if the state allows the formation of socialist communities, either they represent no threat to the establishment or they are its accomplices. He thought socialism to be achievable only through class struggle and the proletarian conquest of power, whereas any other way had to be challenged and destroyed. Hence, Italian anarchist Giovanni Baldelli affirmed: ‘Wherever Marx’s followers came into power, they prohibited and punished every attempt to form social and economic autonomous organisms’.⁶⁵ Engels too criticised the idea of emancipating all humanity at once, rather than beginning with the proletariat.⁶⁶ The primacy of the proletariat became a central concept within the European Left of mid-nineteenth century, when all socialists – a term that then included anarchists, revolutionary communists, and reformist socialists – gathered around the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA) in 1864, the so-called First International. The IWA was both a political and industrial organisation aiming at the protection and emancipation of the working class.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, many anarchists of the time showed interest in the idea of communities, and wrote extensively on the matter. Many – like Bakunin and Kropotkin – mainly saw them as the smallest unit of a post-revolutionary libertarian federation.⁶⁸ On the other hand, other libertarian thinkers – such as Proudhon, Landauer, and Tolstoy – highlighted the potential role of these experiments in causing the peaceful fall of the state by gradually making it obsolete.⁶⁹

Such theorised communities have sometimes informed later experiments, although the lineage between late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century communities is not necessarily direct. One of the objectives of my research is in fact to interrogate the relationship between past theories and contemporary experiments. In the 1960s and 1970s, libertarian individuals and collectives searching for an alternative model to experiment with in their everyday life joined or founded a new type of ‘communities’. These were ‘intentional communities’, whose members came ‘together under shared values, working together toward common goals, building a sustainable alternative society’.⁷⁰ They thus combined the traditional geographic aspect (they occupied a

⁶⁴ Friedrich Engels, ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, accessed 12 June 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/ch01.htm>.

⁶⁵ Giovanni Baldelli, ‘Vita in Comune’, *Volontà*, 30 May 1957.

⁶⁶ Engels, ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’.

⁶⁷ Yuri Steklov, ‘Foundation of The International Workingmen’s Association’, in *History of The First International* (London: Martin Lawrence Limited, 1928), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/steklov/history-first-international/ch03.htm>.

⁶⁸ Mikhail Bakunin, *Stateless Socialism: Anarchism*, accessed 18 June 2014, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bakunin/stateless.html; Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism from Theory to Practice* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), <http://libcom.org/library/anarchism-daniel-guerin-2>.

⁶⁹ Famous is Landauer’s quote about the state: ‘The State is a condition, a certain relationship among human beings, a mode of behavior, we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one and other ... We are the State and continue to be the State until we have created the institutions that form a real community’. Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community. The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University Of California Press, 1973), 226; Leo Tolstoy, *The End of the Age*, 1905, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bright/tolstoy/endofage.html; Leo Tolstoy, ‘On Anarchy’, 1900, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bright/tolstoy/onanarchy.html.

⁷⁰ Donna Oneida, ‘Twin Oaks What Is an Intentional Community?’, *Off Our Backs* 21, no. 4 (1991): 23.

concrete place) with a collective or shared identity.⁷¹ In her early sociological works, Rosabeth Kanter identified three primary motivations for their creation: ‘a desire to live according to religious and spiritual values; a desire to reform society by curing its economic and political ills; and a desire to promote the ‘psychosocial growth’ of the individual’.⁷² In his 1974 investigation on ‘alternative realities’, Andrew Rigby identified two sub-groups amongst the intentional communities aiming at ‘reforming’ society: self-actualising and activist communes. Rigby defined the former as ‘model societies’ ‘contributing towards the creation of a new social order by ... [enabling their] members ... [to] develop their individual skills and creative potential’. Activist communes, meanwhile, are ‘community experiments ... orientated primarily towards [achieving] social change ... by means of direct social involvement and political action in the wider community’.⁷³ Whilst the case studies I present in the following chapters can be seen as mainly activist communities, the first generation of rural libertarian communities – often called ‘colonies’ or ‘communes’ – have aspects of Rigby’s self-actualising communities.

French philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first to declare himself an anarchist in 1840, envisaged the creation of ‘mutualist communities’, or associations, in the form of workers’ co-operatives.⁷⁴ Their objective was to avoid alienation and exploitation at the hands of capitalists.⁷⁵ A peculiarity of these associations of workers was the collective ownership and control of the means of production and exchange, as private property was to be abolished.⁷⁶ ‘Income’, he went on, was to ‘be equivalent to productivity’.⁷⁷ In such a ‘mutualist society’ mankind would finally be free: ‘emancipated from the regulation of market, hierarchy and law’, though still subject to social pressure to avoid egoism.⁷⁸ However, anarchist historian Robert Graham wrote that ‘[b]y the 1860’s ... Proudhon ... had considerably moderated his political views. ... He attempted to develop a democratic, anti-authoritarian conception of the state as a voluntary federation of [communities]’.⁷⁹ Yet, in Proudhon’s idea of state, ‘the powers of central authority are specialized and limited and diminish in number ... as the confederation grows by the adhesion of new [members]’.⁸⁰

⁷¹ On their website, the Fellowship for Intentional Community, thus define intentional communities: ‘Intentional communities’ include ecovillages, cohousing, residential land trusts, income-sharing communes, student co-ops, spiritual communities, and other projects where people live together on the basis of explicit common values’. ‘Welcome to the Fellowship for Intentional Community’, Fellowship for Intentional Community, accessed 7 September 2015, <http://www.ic.org/>.

⁷² Glen O. Robinson, ‘Communities’, *Virginia Law Review* 83, no. 2 (1997): 278.

⁷³ Andrew Rigby, *Alternative Realities. A Study Of Communes And Their Members* (London: Routledge, 1974), 100, 101.

⁷⁴ Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 5.

⁷⁵ Larry Gambone, *Proudhon and Anarchism. Proudhon’s Libertarian Thought and the Anarchist Movement* (Red Lion Press, 1996), <http://www.spunk.org/texts/writers/proudhon/sp001863.html>.

⁷⁶ Guérin, *Anarchism from Theory to Practice*.

⁷⁷ Alan Ritter, *The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), <http://www.ditext.com/ritter/proudhon/pro5.html>.

⁷⁸ Alan Ritter, ‘Proudhon and the Problem of Community’, *The Review of Politics* 29, no. 4 (1967): 470, 474.

⁷⁹ Robert Graham, *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1 (Montreal/New York/London: Black Rose Books, 2005), 72.

⁸⁰ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *The Principle of Federation and the Need to Reconstitute the Party of Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1863), <http://www.ditext.com/proudhon/federation/federation.html>.

Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin, who established ‘the leading principles of modern anarchism’, discarded Proudhon’s state as ‘a mere business office, a sort of central accounting bureau at the service of society’.⁸¹ In fact, he thought State and Church had to be destroyed by a mass revolution (or Social Revolution) before a real alternative could be build.⁸² In his 1867 speech at the League for Peace and Freedom, Bakunin envisaged: ‘the free federation of individuals into communes, of communes into provinces, of the provinces into nations’.⁸³ Thus, the commune – or community – was at the centre of Bakunin’s federation, but it was to be administered by a council of elected delegates, responsible to the electorate and subject to recall.⁸⁴ This marked a major difference with his fellow countryman and anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin, who preferred direct democracy or self-government: direct involvement of the people in the process of decision-making, ‘the government of oneself by oneself’.⁸⁵ In addition, Kropotkin replaced Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s idea of distribution with a communistic principle. Hence, rather than ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to the *work done*’, anarcho-communist communes adopted ‘...to each according to the need’.⁸⁶ However, Kropotkin agreed with Bakunin’s federative idea that had the commune at its core.⁸⁷ In particular, he envisaged:

[A] multitude of associations, federated for all the purposes which require federation: trade federations for production of all sorts, - agricultural, industrial, intellectual, artistic; communes for consumption, making provision for dwellings, gas works, supplies of food, sanitary arrangements, etc.; federations of communes among themselves, and federations of communes with trade organizations.⁸⁸

While the idea of revolution was central for both Bakunin and Kropotkin, a third Russian libertarian – writer Leo Tolstoy – rejected violence and highlighted the importance of the ‘teaching of Christ’.⁸⁹ He foresaw the fall of State and the natural creation of a social organisation based on agricultural communes ‘founded upon mutual agreement ... with communal possession of land [and] a co-operative system in industrial undertakings’. Such communities would then be free to enter new ‘mutual combinations’ (federations) founded on mutual agreements.⁹⁰

⁸¹ Roger N. Baldwin, ed., *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 165; Mikhail Bakunin, ‘Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism’, 1867, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/various/reasons-of-state.htm>.

⁸² Bakunin, *Stateless Socialism: Anarchism*.

⁸³ Bakunin, ‘Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism’. Bakunin later developed this concept also in: Mikhail Bakunin, *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*, 1871, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bakunin/pariscommune.html.

⁸⁴ Guérin, *Anarchism from Theory to Practice*.

⁸⁵ Kropotkin strongly criticised the adoption of the representative system by the 1871 Paris Commune, as he thought that, by electing representatives, the communards ‘abdicated their own initiative in favor of an assembly of people elected more or less by chance’. Guérin.

⁸⁶ Dana Ward, ‘Alchemy at Clarens: Kropotkin and Reclus, 1877– 1881’, in *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, ed. Nathan J. Jun and Shane Wahl (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 222.

⁸⁷ Colin Ward, ‘The Anarchist Sociology of Federalism’, *Freedom*, July 1992, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/anar/en/display/334>.

⁸⁸ Pyotr Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Boston-New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1889), http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/memoirs/memoirs6_4.html.

⁸⁹ Tolstoy, ‘On Anarchy’.

⁹⁰ Tolstoy, *The End of the Age*.

A re-elaboration of these ‘classic’ anarchist communitarian projects emerged with the influential American thinker Murray Bookchin. With his work, anarchism finally ‘re-integrated the question of humanity’s relationship to the natural environment’ that Kropotkin’s anarcho-communism had initially developed.⁹¹ He started in the heat of the countercultural and back-to-the-land movements (1968) by envisioning the creation of ‘ecological communities’ as opposed to the modern city.⁹² After analysing the effects of the post-war industrial boom, Bookchin realised that ‘our present ecological problems arise from deep-seated social problems. [Hence, to solve the former, one must] resolutely deal... with problems within society’.⁹³ To the popularity of his project contributed the widespread awareness about the existence of a global ecological crisis and the human community’s deteriorated ties.⁹⁴ He later framed this idea within the theory of social ecology: ‘nearly all of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems’. Hence, he proposed as a solution the creation of confederations of interdependent but self-governing ‘ecocommunities’ (‘libertarian municipalism’).⁹⁵ Their economy, based on renewable energy, would be municipalised through the collective ownership of the means of production and a general assembly to decide policies (direct democracy). He aimed at ‘the decentralization of cities into confederally united communities’ to start in the neighbourhoods of ‘giant cities’ as well as in networks of small towns.⁹⁶ Anarchist magazines, such as the British *Anarchy* and the Italian *A-Rivista*, published his articles, and his ideas inspired several anarchists to found or enter rural communes. During my interviews, several British and Italian libertarians confirmed his importance by naming him or his ideas as a strong theoretical reference point.

(Con)federations were a recurring topic in the blueprint for anarchist societies envisioned by influential authors like Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Tolstoy, but also by less known anarchist thinkers like Gustav Landauer.⁹⁷ All agreed on the importance, for the survival of an anarchist community, of a network – a federation. Academics like geographer David Featherstone reached similar conclusions. In 2005, he pictured local communities as hopefully involved in forming solidarities within and between places and social groups to oppose neoliberalism.⁹⁸ Although he never mentioned a confederation of communities, this perfectly fits his description of a network that would neither ‘fetishise the local against ... the global’ nor ‘advocate [a] ...

⁹¹ Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances* (Edinburgh: Ak Press, 2006), 60–62.

⁹² John Clark, ‘Municipal Dreams: Social Ecological Critique of Bookchin’s Politics’, The Anarchist Library, 1998, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/john-clark-municipal-dreams-social-ecological-critique-of-bookchin-s-politics>.

⁹³ Murray Bookchin, ‘Murray Bookchin: What Is Social Ecology?’, *Green from below* (blog), accessed 28 October 2015, <https://greenfrombelow.wordpress.com/murray-bookchin-what-is-social-ecology/>; In 1963, using a pseudonym, Bookchin’s wrote his first analysis ‘on the biological hazards of the chemical and radioactive pollution of nature’:

Lewis Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963).

⁹⁴ John P. Clark, ‘A Social Ecology’, accessed 1 July 2014, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/anar/en/display/303>.

⁹⁵ Murray Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism* (Oakland-Edinburgh: Ak Press, 2007).

⁹⁶ Bookchin, 19, 47–50.

⁹⁷ For an introduction to Landauer’s view on communities, see: Lunn, *Prophet of Community. The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer*; Larry Gambone, ‘For Community. The Communitarian Anarchism of Gustav Landauer’, accessed 25 June 2014,

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bright/landauer/forcommunity.html.

⁹⁸ David Featherstone et al., ‘Progressive Localism and the Construction of Political Alternatives’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 2 (2012): 179.

globalised opposition to neoliberal globalisation through institutions such as a world parliament'.⁹⁹ Lefebvre similarly insisted on the necessity of 'achieving globality' to ensure the survival of *autogestion*, which he defined as an anarchistic form of grassroots direct democracy.¹⁰⁰

Overall, the libertarian idea of community profoundly challenged the mainstream one, as anarchists generally intended communities as place-bound and radical experiences. Ideas that especially contrast with the recent tendency of governments to sponsor 'cohesive communities', and of scholars to present them as placeless and 'imagined'. However, Miranda Joseph warned radicals about the danger of 'position[ing] community as the defining other of modernity, of capitalism'. Like the community as 'paradise lost' for the mainstream, this too might generate 'a Romantic narrative of community' characterised by 'ideals of cooperation, equality, and communion'.¹⁰¹ In fact, this emerged during several interviews with Italian communarians, who tended to idealise the historical rural commune of Urupia (one called them 'a guiding light').¹⁰² Nonetheless, libertarian communities as a concept and as concrete experiences resisted and adapted in relation to changing socio-economic contexts and challenges, like the need for an ecologically sustainable society.

4. Libertarian communities during 'classical anarchism'

Post-1968 libertarian communities drew on anarchist theories and principles about communitarian societies, but concrete examples of such libertarian societies were also highly influential. Two of the most famous and inspiring cases are Makhnovist Ukraine and revolutionary Spain. The former refers to the Ukrainian region of Gulyai-Polye, freed by the anarchist Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine in 1918. There, peasant communities known as 'free communes' sprang up under the influence and protection of the anarchist army and its anarcho-communist leader Nestor Makhno. Whilst the Russian Civil War raged all around, regional congresses of peasants, workers and partisans were created to co-ordinate and set economic and social tasks, but each commune (or soviet) kept its autonomy and self-governance. However, as Piotr Arshinov noticed in 1928, 'the context of war made the creation and operation of these bodies extremely difficult, and for that reason, complete organization of them was never successfully carried through'. By August 1921 the libertarians had fought both the White and the Red Army, but had to finally surrender to the latter, which dissolved the free soviets and ensured the transition from anarchist to authoritarian communism.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ David Featherstone, 'Towards the Relational Construction of Militant Particularisms: Or Why the Geographers of Past Struggles Matter for Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation', *Antipode* 37, no. 2 (March 2005): 266, 267.

¹⁰⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 150, 16.

¹⁰¹ Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, viii, 1.

¹⁰² Andrea, Interview on Libera, 22 July 2014.

¹⁰³ Piotr Arshinov, 'History of The Makhnovist Movement', in *No Gods, No Masters*, ed. Daniel Guérin (Oakland-Edinburgh: Ak Press, 2005), 515–17.

Revolutionary Spain (1936-39) is perhaps the best known example of a libertarian society on a large scale, when anarchists set up collectives based on Bakunin's principles.¹⁰⁴ Years of anarchist proselytism had led to a deep reflection on the structure of a post-revolutionary society. Thus, after the 1936 general strike that saw entrepreneurs and managers flee, workers applied Bakunin's collectivism by taking over the direction of factories, farms, and workplaces. Furthermore, according to the spreading of anarcho-syndicalists ideas, the unions took charge of production and supply organised in the fashion of a bottom-up federation. This happened especially in the areas where the anarchist union CNT was particularly strong, like Catalonia and Aragon. The land was collectivised and worked in common by rural workers on a voluntary base. The unions received and marketed all produce, and paid the wages.¹⁰⁵ The autonomy that is intrinsic to anarchism produced a variety of communities – from federations of independent rural communes that abolished the use of money, to the CNT-supervised organisation of the complex life in a large modern city like Barcelona.¹⁰⁶ As the German anarchist Augustin Souchy put it in his 1937 first-hand description: 'Amid great difficulties, groping their way and learning by trial and error, they pressed ever forward, striving to build up an equitable economic system in which the workers themselves are the beneficiaries of the fruits of their labors'.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, by 1939 the dream of a collectivist anarchist society was interrupted by the hardships of the civil war, causing scarcities of raw materials and loss of foreign markets, and by the joint hostility of conservatives as well as of authoritarian communists. Despite their short lifespans, both Makhnovist Ukraine and revolutionary Spain became important sources of inspiration for the British and Italian libertarian movements. Libertarian societies were established also in Britain and Italy, although outside the revolutionary framework and on a much smaller scale. The relationship between such experiments and the national libertarian movements was troubled, though. By moving on now to focus on examples pre-dating the case studies at the centre of my thesis, and retrace the history of their relationships with anarchism, we can explore the commonalities and differences between pre- and post-1968 communities.

4.1 Pre-1968 communities and libertarians in Italy

Inspired by socialist or anarchist ideas, many people founded urban or rural libertarian spaces between the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century – what historians of anarchism call 'classical anarchism'. Their generally short and troubled life stimulated the political considerations of socialist and anarchist thinkers. For example, of the several hundred workers' associations set up around 1848, and source of inspiration for

¹⁰⁴ Sam Dolgoff, *The Anarchist Collectives. Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936–1939* (New York: New York Free Life Editions, 1974), <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/sam-dolgoff-editor-the-anarchist-collectives#toc34>.

¹⁰⁵ Augustin Souchy, 'Collectivization in Spain', in *No Gods, No Masters*, by Daniel Guérin (Oakland-Edinburgh: Ak Press, 2005), 444.

¹⁰⁶ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 356–98.

¹⁰⁷ Souchy, 'Collectivization in Spain', 446.

Proudhon's mutual society, only twenty remained nine years later. Their error, according to the libertarian thinker, consisted in their transformation into organisations similar to collective employers ruled by business principles. He believed they should have educated their workers in 'true' self-management, co-operated with other confederate associations, and acted as sovereign communes.¹⁰⁸

The teachings of Proudhon spread in mid-nineteenth century's Italy thanks to the writings of Carlo Pisacane – a duke, a revolutionary, and an intellectual. However, by the end of the century, the focus on revolutionary class struggle had become dominant within both the Italian and British anarchist movements. The Italian anarchist movement started with Bakunin's arrival in 1864, but it was only when in 1869 the Italian groups entered the IWA that 'an influential anarchist movement began to arise' in the south.¹⁰⁹ Yet, in that region of 'poverty-stricken peasants' anarchism did not make any advances outside the larger towns. New militants began instead setting up sections in the north following the popularity of the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871. This shifted permanently the geographical centre of Italian anarchism away from the south. The Italian Federation of the International grew steadily – over 30,000 members in 1874 – and distanced itself from the authoritarian Marxian wing, in fact it embraced anarchist communism and committed itself to social revolution (as opposed to one led by a political vanguard). Several failed insurrections led to frustration within the movement, which opened the doors to the propaganda by the deed in the form of individual actions aiming at killing European and American monarchs and politicians. The state answer was a fierce repression that drove many anarchists abroad, especially to Switzerland, United States, and Great Britain. The anarcho-communist Errico Malatesta – son of landowners and reference point of the Italian movement – lived part of his life in London because there the political repression was less severe, and the British government tolerated propaganda by mouth and print.¹¹⁰ Italian exiles became 'missionaries of their ideas' and, by the end of the century, they published more expatriate journals than all the other national groups put together.¹¹¹

A small number of Italian libertarians set up '[s]ocialist anarchist colonies or communities' that anarchist historian Pier Carlo Masini described as aiming to go beyond anarchist organisations as tools in the struggle against the state. He believed they wanted to show by example the possibility of building anarchist spaces within mainstream society.¹¹² They enacted what contemporary anarchists define 'prefigurative politics' – they aimed to 'realise anarchist social relations within the activities and collective structures' of their daily life.¹¹³ Crushed by state repression, the Italian anarchist movement condemned however every attempt to divert its weak forces from the objective of social revolution. Emblematic is the case of

¹⁰⁸ Guérin, *Anarchism from Theory to Practice*.

¹⁰⁹ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 327–29; Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 54.

¹¹⁰ Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 34.

¹¹¹ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 327–46.

¹¹² Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia Degli Anarchici Italiani*, Second (Milano: Rizzoli, 1970), 247–50.

¹¹³ Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!* (London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2008), 35.

Malatesta calling Giovanni Rossi ‘a deserter’.¹¹⁴ Rossi was a Tuscan veterinarian who founded first a rural cooperative in northern Italy (Cittadella) in 1887, and then the rural community Cecilia in 1890 which, although set up in Brazil, had a majority of Italians.¹¹⁵ Membership at Cecilia varied through time from the six initial ‘explorers’, who built everything from scratch, to the 150 settlers of 1891 who worked incessantly to make the commune as self-sufficient as possible – they even built a pharmacy, a school and a library. Then, a year later, the number of communards had dropped to 64, and Cecilia was finally closed in 1894.¹¹⁶ Researchers still have different opinions on the main reason behind its end – from the internal jealousies triggered by Rossi’s ‘imposed’ free-love regime to the agricultural inexperience of the settlers. Other possible causes are a limited financial budget or even the nature of the commune itself, which Rossi defined a positivist study of human behaviours in an anarchist society.¹¹⁷

In the same period, a new type of libertarian spaces started appearing in European urban contexts: the people’s houses (*case del popolo* in Italian). These were spaces for socialising, participating in cultural activities, and accessing mutual-aid services. Besides carrying out a pragmatic function and hosting recreational activities, they also offered a space to organise political actions. In Italy, *case del popolo* attracted both workers and radicals, and became ‘hubs of lively political participation and debates’.¹¹⁸ Like rural communes they enacted the social relations of a model socialist/anarchist society. An example of these libertarian communities is the *casa del popolo* of Via Capo d’Africa in Rome (1906-26) which functioned as a common house for socialists, anarchists, republicans and communists, and as headquarters for workers’ struggles.¹¹⁹ Between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, many anarchists however fled Italy. They tried to avoid the penal colonies and Crispi’s special laws, which aimed to stop the series of acts of terrorism known as ‘propaganda of the deed’. The most famous case was the assassination of king Umberto I of Italy by the hand of the anarchist weaver Gaetano Bresci on 29 May 1900.

With the new century, a new tendency spread among the working class: syndicalism. Anarcho-syndicalists saw unions as a means to improve the conditions of the working class, but also to mobilise workers for revolutionary actions, and as the organisational basis of the post-revolutionary federate society.¹²⁰ In Italy, anarcho-syndicalists founded the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (Italian Syndicalist Union, USI) in 1912, which reached 500,000 members by 1919. It

¹¹⁴ Zecca Castel, ‘Quelli Della Cecilia’.

¹¹⁵ Cittadella (1887-90) was an experimental community that Rossi founded in Italy with families of farmers that he tried to make libertarian, without success.

¹¹⁶ Rosellina Gosi, *Il Socialismo Utopistico. Giovanni Rossi E La Colonia Anarchica Cecilia* (Milano: Moizzi, 1977).

¹¹⁷ Zecca Castel, ‘Quelli Della Cecilia’; Gosi, *Il Socialismo Utopistico. Giovanni Rossi E La Colonia Anarchica Cecilia*, 78.

¹¹⁸ ‘Dossier Centri Sociali’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, Ottobre 1989, 8. For further information on *case del popolo*, see: Maurizio Degl’Innocenti, ed., *Le Case Del Popolo in Europa: Dalle Origini Alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Florence: Sansoni, 1984); Marco De Michelis, *Case Del Popolo* (Venice: Marsilio, 1986); Alberto Ciampi and Sergio Mechi, eds., *Case Del Popolo, Case Di Tutti?* (San Casciano in Val di Pesa: Centro studi storici della Val di Pesa, 2011).

¹¹⁹ Giuseppe Sircana, *Nel Cuore Rosso Di Roma: Il Celio E La Casa Del Popolo* (Roma: Ediesse, 2016).

¹²⁰ Carl Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1999), 13.

was especially rooted in the industrialised northern cities of Milan and Turin, and its militants were actively involved in the wave of strikes of *settimana rossa* (red week, 1914) and *biennio rosso* (1919-20). The extent of these episodes convinced the anarchists that the social revolution was about to happen. But on both occasions, moderate Left withdrawal and state repression led to mass arrests. Finally, fascism persecuted and suppressed all anarchist organisations (USI included), and once more the militants were sent to penal colonies or found refuge abroad, where they kept Italian anarchism alive by publishing magazines.¹²¹ Many went to Spain, where libertarians had been setting up self-managed collectives, and participated in the Spanish civil war to defend the republic from the military coup.¹²² Then, after the failure of the Spanish Revolution and the outbreak of the Second World War, Italian anarchists joined the Resistance to fight the nazi-fascist occupation of Italy. Between its appearance and the Second World War, the majority of the Italian anarchist movement maintained a hostile attitude towards rural communitarian forms of anarchism. Italians preferred practices that aimed at triggering the social revolution, like assassinating a king or organising factory workers. Such actions caused state repression, which fuelled the insurrectionist and class-struggle currents characterising Italian anarchism. A small number of anarchists was nonetheless involved in the foundation of communes. Confirming the repressive attitude of the Italian kingdom (1861-1945) against anarchists is the fact that the most famous libertarian commune of Italians was actually abroad.

4.2 Pre-1968 communities and libertarians in Britain

Despite the initial theoretical influence of foreign thinkers like Proudhon and Bakunin, Italian anarchists had soon found their own national reference points, such as anarcho-communist Malatesta. In Britain, on the other hand, foreigners played a central role within the anarchist movement for many years. Fundamental were the Soho and East End clubs for foreign workers, and especially the Jewish immigrant workers, which provided ‘more recruits to anarchism than the rest of the population of Britain’ between the mid-1880s and 1914. Jewish immigrants also founded a mutual-aid organization called The Workers’ Circle, which provided progressive education and care for the sick and needy. However, anarchist historian George Woodcock noted that these types of activities ‘seemed to vindicate anarchist ideas of voluntary organization, but it must be remembered that they were carried out by people whose traditions had inclined them for centuries to practice a high degree of co-operation as a protection against external threats’.¹²³ Clubs and mutual-aid organisations were nevertheless the only types of urban libertarian communities in Britain at that time. The equivalent of people’s houses – ‘people’s palaces’ and ‘social centres’ – had in fact a normative role. Late-nineteenth century social centres, not to be confused with present-day social centres, were clubs and institutes with the objective of helping

¹²¹ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 346–55.

¹²² More information about the Spanish libertarian collectives can be found here: Souchy, ‘Collectivization in Spain’.

¹²³ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 447.

‘young men and women ... be so full of healthy and useful effort that there shall be no room for what is unworthy and mean’.¹²⁴ Their function was comparable to that of early nineteenth-century Sunday schools, which aimed to ‘render [the children of the poor] honest, obedient, courteous, industrious, submissive, and orderly’.¹²⁵ People’s palaces and social centres participated in the training of new docile generations of citizens and workers.

The arrival of foreign militant anarchist exiles contributed meanwhile to the growth of the British anarchist movement by introducing more thorough theoretical and practical frameworks that left less space for revolutionary spontaneity. Particularly active in this was Kropotkin, who helped anarchist communism become the dominant anarchist trend in Britain. British and Irish libertarians were numerous among the ‘literary rebels’, such as William Morris and Oscar Wilde. This last group of people ‘on the verge of the anarchist movement’ saw principles like self-management and anti-authoritarianism as the political extension of their emotional love for individual freedom, which they saw as necessary for the flowering of art. All these elements combined helped anarchism become a considerable fraction of the numerically small British socialist movement in the late 1880s and 1890s, which Woodcock describes as ‘the real heyday of English anarchism’.¹²⁶ Kropotkin spent decades in Britain, where he became an influential figure of the emerging anarchist movement. He was in favour of federated communes as the base for a future post-revolutionary society, but he shared his friend Malatesta’s distrust of focusing on them too much before the social revolution. When in 1895 a group of libertarian communists established a colony at Clousden Hill Farm, near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and invited him to be their treasurer, Kropotkin wrote to decline and added:

I must say that I have little confidence in schemes of communist communities started under the present conditions, and always regret to see men and women going to suffer all sorts of privations in order, in most cases, to find only disappointment at the end: retiring for many years from the work of propaganda of ideas among the great masses, and of aid to the masses in their emancipation, for making an experiment which has many chances for being a failure.¹²⁷

By 1902 Clousden Hill had come to an end, even though the communards had applied all the suggestions he provided. He suggested founding the community near a large city (where members ‘can enjoy the many benefits of civilisation’), to start with intensive agriculture (for easier, varied and secure crops), to keep ‘a family and friendly grouping life’, to live according to anarchist principles (in particular to avoid the appearance of elected authorities), and finally to reduce household work to the minimum – so not to replicate the feminine condition of slavery of the old

¹²⁴ Quintin Hogg, ed., *The Social Centres of London: Being a Comprehensive Guide to the Social Educational, Recreative and Religious Institutes, and Clubs of the Metropolis* (London: Polytechnic Reception Bureau, 1892), 9–14.

¹²⁵ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963), 401.

¹²⁶ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 439–48.

¹²⁷ Pyotr Kropotkin, ‘Proposed Communist Settlement: A New Colony for Tyneside or Wearside’, 1895, <http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/kropotkin/propsett.html>.

society.¹²⁸ According to the anarchist author W. C. Hart, the failure of the community was due to the practical inexperience and theoretical differences of the colonists: 'The colony prospered for a while, but [then] came to grief in a tangle of quarrelling'.¹²⁹ In the end, they were unable to apply Kropotkin's most important tenet – being part of a network of federated communes.

Another Russian, anarchist writer Leo Tolstoy, inspired the foundation of one of the most famous and long-lasting libertarian communities in Britain: Whiteway colony. Tolstoy rejected the term anarchism because he associated it with violence, but Woodcock stated that 'his complete opposition to the state and other authoritarian forms brings his ideas clearly within the orbit of anarchistic thought. His followers and the modern pacifist anarchists ... accept[ed] the label he rejected' and built anarchist farming communities mostly in Holland, Britain, and the United States, before and during the Second World War. He intended libertarian communities 'as a kind of peaceful version of the propaganda by deed'.¹³⁰ Whiteway colony started in Gloucestershire in 1898 and still exists.¹³¹ Within a couple of years, though, its original anarchism faded as the communal land was divided into individual or family plots to overcome the accusations that 'whilst some of the colonists worked hard, the majority sponged idly upon their labours'. This, together with frictions on the ground of sexual freedom and group dynamics, led to several defections, but the community survived.¹³² Decades after the experiments of utopian socialists like Owen, libertarian communities found fertile ground in Britain inspired by the progress of South American experiments that 'aroused considerable interest', like Colonia Cosmé in Paraguay, Los Buenos Amigos in Peru, and Topolobambo in Mexico.¹³³

Kropotkin's letter to the communards of Clousden Hill, show him clearly comparing this experiment in communitarianism to a retirement from active politics. Such self-seclusion was often pin-pointed as one of the causes of the stagnancy of anarchism during what was otherwise a period of steady growth for the general socialist movement, which diluted the anarchist element 'almost to the point of disappearance'.¹³⁴ There were however other important causes for this. One is that anarchist ideas on tactics and objectives had permeated into the industrial organisations thus turning anarchism into 'a major cause of concern for the British State', which reacted with repression.¹³⁵ Anarchist newspapers were suppressed during the First World War. Even more important was the split of the movement between pro-war and anti-war components. This caused a decline that affected the whole anarchist movement in Britain for two decades, until the enthusiasm for the Spanish civil war revitalised British anarchism.¹³⁶ Before and during the

¹²⁸ Kropotkin.

¹²⁹ W C Hart, *Confessions of an Anarchist* (London: E. Grant Richards, 1906), 78, 79.

¹³⁰ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 21.

¹³¹ 'Whiteway Colony', Diggers & Dreamers, accessed 20 July 2015, <http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/communities/existing/whiteway-colony>.

¹³² Hart, *Confessions of an Anarchist*, 80. For a story of the Whiteway Colony from the point of view of a member, see: Nellie Shaw, *Whiteway: A Colony on the Cotswolds* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1935).

¹³³ Nigel Todd, *Roses and Revolutionists* (London: People's publications, 1986), 11.

¹³⁴ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 451–52.

¹³⁵ Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 30, 44.

¹³⁶ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 452, 453.

Second World War, rural anarcho-Christian communes – like the Tolstoyan colony of Stapleton in North Yorkshire and the Landauer-inspired communities of Ashton Keynes in Wiltshire – expanded and prospered. Their pacifism and the possibility of growing their own food made them particularly valuable during the war, especially for conscientious objectors.¹³⁷ However, after visiting several of these communities, Woodcock concluded they had ‘produced no effective challenge to existing society. Their success has been limited to the functional level, and they have most value as experiments in free and communal working relationships’.¹³⁸

While rural libertarian communities were a rarity in Italy, several were established in Britain between the foundation of the First International and the Second World War. This was possible because the British anarchist movement was smaller and more heterogeneous than Italy’s. As Woodcock confirmed, British anarchists were particularly interested and active in educational and community-living experiments.¹³⁹ Although in both cases the class-struggle components were dominant until the First World War, the different political traditions and contexts led British anarchists to see a social revolution as a less imminent event. This explains the different degrees of hostility of two anarcho-communists like Kropotkin and Malatesta towards rural libertarian communities. A further expansion of these experiments took place in the inter-war years and during the Second World War, but they posed no threat to the mainstream by then. Different was the attitude of the radical movement towards urban communities like mutual-aid societies and *case del popolo*. Their role as cultural, social and political hubs made them central to the day-to-day life of libertarians in both countries. The following chapter will continue this comparative analysis and extend the investigation. I will look at the role of libertarian communities and their relationship with the broader radical movement as so-called ‘classical anarchism’ (1860s-1940s) gradually lost its influence as a political movement. I show how in the years that followed anarchism re-emerged as a component of the new social movements of 1960s.

¹³⁷ Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 7–42.

¹³⁸ Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 452, 453.

¹³⁹ Woodcock, 451–52.

Chapter One

Post-1968 libertarian communities:

Reservoirs for radicals or training centres for anarchists?

This chapter situates post-1968 libertarian communities within their contemporary socio-political context. It sheds light on their fundamental role as radical hubs, and on how this varied across different times and spaces. It does so by retracing their historical development, and by reviewing the literature that has attempted to understand post-1968 libertarian communities and their context. Firstly, this will illustrate the elements of continuity and change between contemporary communities and the pre-1968 experiments I presented in my Introduction. Secondly, it will provide a fundamental historical and theoretical framework for the case studies I investigate in the following chapters. To do this, I will first explore the processes that led to the post-1968 revivification and spreading of libertarian communities. I will outline the key transformations that occurred in post-war Britain and Italy paying attention in particular to the development of countercultural and anarchist movements. Then, in the following section, I will analyse in detail the contribution of case studies of urban and rural communities to the libertarian activism of post-1968 Britain and Italy. Finally, I will present my conclusions on the influence of libertarian communities on radical activism.

1. Countercultures and the Left: Paving the way for the rebirth of libertarian communities

Fascism (in Italy) and then the outbreak of Second World War (in both Britain and Italy) left libertarian communal experiments in a deadlock as many were either closed or closely monitored by the authorities. An exception to this situation were some British rural communes, which actually thrived during the war because of the arrival of conscientious objectors. After the war, the Italian anarchist movement was paralysed by an endless internal debate on conflicting social analyses and political strategies (class-struggle anarchism versus anti-classist and individualists), and on the need and form of a national anarchist organisation.¹⁴⁰ It split in various currents and weakened as it lost two thirds of its members to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) by the early 1950s.¹⁴¹ Since its weakness made any revolutionary outbursts unlikely, a growing number of Italian anarchists seemed to rediscover rural libertarian communities as an alternative and small-scale way to anarchy. The anarchist periodical *Volontà* contributed to this process by circulating articles of Italian and foreign authors who sparked internal debates around the use and form of theoretical and concrete communities. Between 1946 and 1996, when it ceased publication, *Volontà* covered a wide variety of themes and itself experienced changing fortunes that led to

¹⁴⁰ For a short history of Italian anarchism from 1870 to 1970, see: Alessandro Aruffo, *Breve Storia Degli Anarchici Italiani* (Roma: Datanews, 2006).

¹⁴¹ Antonio Senta, *Utopia E Azione: Per Una Storia Dell'anarchismo in Italia (1848-1984)* (Milano: Elèuthera, 2015), 186–87.

several transformations – from 1987 onwards, for example, all articles in each issue had a common thread. It remained committed to its goal of contributing to a theoretical reflection within the anarchist world, however. By looking across its run, we see a stronger interest in theorised anarchist societies between the post-war years and the 1960s than in the later period. At that time, Italian anarchists tried to revive their weak anarchist movement by elaborating a theoretical framework and a project that distanced them from the ‘Leninist asphyxia’.¹⁴² They believed that ‘the structure of the European society is crumbling before our eyes’ and studied possible alternatives, such as *mondialismo comunitario* (communitarian internationalism, a sort of world confederation).¹⁴³ At the same time, *Volontà* offered insight on concrete historical examples like Israeli kibbutzim, and the communities established in Russia and the Ukraine after the Bolshevik and Makhnovist revolutions, in Spain during the civil war, and in China during the Great Leap Forward.¹⁴⁴ Being Bolshevik and Maoist communes not libertarian, the authors used them as examples of how not to establish an anarchist community.

Conversely, in Britain, an anarchist-inspired squatting movement spread at the end of the Second World War. At its origin was the desperate housing situation with half a million houses destroyed or made unfit for habitation by German bombings.¹⁴⁵ Within this context, a group of Brighton anarchists managed to spread the concept of direct action by breaking into empty houses and installing themselves and other homeless households. Although the results were not libertarian communities, such actions had the merit of spreading and normalising a practice that many libertarians adopted from the late-1960s to establish rural and urban communes. Researcher Andrew Friend noted that those post-war anarchists, known as the Vigilantes, were mainly people with experience of unemployment and anti-fascist struggles. In July 1945 they claimed a membership of 1,000, and obtained considerable local support because of Brighton landlords’ habit of leaving their properties empty to profit from high holiday rents. The press coverage had the unintentional effect of presenting this successful alternative nationwide. Other people started squatting in cities like Birmingham, Liverpool and London, and the Vigilantes began travelling

¹⁴² V., ‘Federalismo’, *Volontà*, 15 June 1950.

¹⁴³ Aldo Capitini, ‘La “Comunità Aperta”’, *Volontà*, 15 September 1948; Herbert Read, ‘Comunità Di Individui’, *Volontà*, 15 January 1949; Baldelli, ‘Vita in Comune’; Giuseppe Delfino, ‘Mondialismo Comunitario’, *Volontà*, November 1963; Delfino; Giuseppe Delfino, ‘Mondialismo Comunitario’, *Volontà*, December 1963; Giuseppe Delfino, ‘Mondialismo Comunitario’, *Volontà*, January 1964; Giuseppe Delfino, ‘Mondialismo Comunitario’, *Volontà*, March 1964; Giuseppe Delfino, ‘Mondialismo Comunitario’, *Volontà*, May 1964; Giuseppe Delfino, ‘Mondialismo Comunitario’, *Volontà*, September 1964.

¹⁴⁴ George Woodcock, ‘Collettività in Palestina’, *Volontà*, 1 December 1947; Economicus, ‘Le Comunità Palestinesi’, *Volontà*, 15 July 1948; Corrado De Benedetti, ‘Le Comunità Palestinesi’, *Volontà*, 15 August 1948; Augustin Souchy, ‘Le Collettività Di Aragona’, *Volontà*, 15 March 1950; Gaston Leval, ‘Comunità Libertarie Di Spagna’, *Volontà*, 15 June 1950; Pino Tagliazucchi, ‘Villaggi in Israele’, *Volontà*, 15 June 1950; Giovanni Baldelli, ‘Esperienze Comunitarie’, *Volontà*, September 1958; Garcia Victor, ‘La Cina Comunitaria’, *Volontà*, March 1961; Z. H., ‘Collettività Volontarie in Israele’, *Volontà*, June 1963; Gabriel Cohn-Bendit and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, ‘I Soviets’, *Volontà*, October 1969; Gaston Leval, ‘Collettività Anarchiche Spagnole’, *Volontà*, April 1970; ‘Collettività Anarchiche. Spagna 1936-1939’, *Volontà*, December 1971; Ruben Prieto, ‘Esperienza Della Comunidad Del Sur. Necessità E Limiti Dei Tentativi Autogestionari’, *Volontà*, October 1979; Ronald Creagh, ‘Utopie Vissute: Le Comunità Libertarie Negli Stati Uniti d’America’, *Volontà*, September 1981.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*, The Penguin History of Britain (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 240.

to address public meetings.¹⁴⁶ The former Vigilante Helen Steer observed that ‘[p]eople were with us [because] they needed houses’, and often the police too turned a blind eye to their activities.¹⁴⁷ Among the most active local authorities was Bristol’s, where the heavy German bombing that destroyed 3,000 houses and damaged further 90,000 properties. There, the council requisitioned every house advertised for sale.¹⁴⁸ Before the Second World War there had been many episodes of squatting, but what the anarchist Vigilantes had started was the first large-scale squatting movement since the Diggers of the seventeenth century. Unlike the wave of 1960s-1970s occupations, the post-war movement involved whole families, and the establishment was usually sympathetic with the squatters. All this was finally halted with the reaction of Churchill’s peacetime government, which gave local authorities the powers to take over empty buildings for civilian purposes, and increased police presence. The spirit of ‘radical revolt’ was also curtailed by a consensual approach to politics and the economic boom in the following post-war years. This situation favoured the comeback and growth of the ‘more liberal-pacifist, intellectual and artistic centred avant-garde’ within the British anarchist movement.¹⁴⁹

1.1 Youth (re)politicisation in the long 1960s

In the late-1950s and early-1960s both British and Italian economies were experiencing a period of growth – emphasised by the respective governments and mainstream media. Famous are 1957 Prime Minister Macmillan’s slogan ‘never had it so good’ and the Italian definition of the 1960s as ‘the economic miracle’. However, social scientists Block and Langman noticed in 1974 that the economic wellbeing had come at the price of a new set of dominant values focused around achievement, individualism and rationality.¹⁵⁰ As a reaction to all this, young people developed countercultures.¹⁵¹ The term was coined by American sociologist J. Milton Yinger to indicate sets of alternative values that rejected and aimed at replacing the hegemonic ones.¹⁵² There were different reasons for repudiating the dominant culture. Some wanted to ameliorate what they felt as injustice, others sought self-realisation, but what the majority of these ‘rebels’ had in common was the young age. Nonetheless, countercultures varied in number of members, popularity, life span, rituals – use of language and clothes – and especially in the set of values rejected and proposed.

Jonathon Green’s work on countercultures identifies the beatniks or beats as the first real British post-war counterculture. Inspired by the 1950s American writers of the ‘beat generation’,

¹⁴⁶ Wates and Wolmar, *Squatting. The Real Story*, 110.

¹⁴⁷ Jane Bellamy et al., *Who Was Harry Cowley?* (Brighton: Queenspark Books, 1984), 26, 29.

¹⁴⁸ Wates and Wolmar, *Squatting. The Real Story*, 110; ‘Bombing in the Bristol Area’, The history of flight, accessed 14 July 2015, <http://www.century-of-flight.net/Aviation%20history/WW2/bombing%20in%20the%20Bristol%20area.htm>.

¹⁴⁹ Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 53.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Block and Lauren Langman, ‘Youth and Work: “The Diffusion of ‘Countercultural’ Values”’, *Youth and Society* 5, no. 4 (1974): 413.

¹⁵¹ Martin Klimke and Joachin Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

¹⁵² J. Milton Yinger, ‘Contraculture and Subculture’, *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 5 (1960): 625–35.

many students with a middle-class background identified themselves as ‘beats’ in Britain, adding to the US-version a ‘mixture of art college superheroes’ like Jarry and Duchamp, and a direct involvement in pacifist movements. They attributed great importance to antiauthoritarianism, music as a universal language connecting people, and travelling by hitchhiking as a way to broaden one’s horizons. British and American beats travelled and exported their countercultural values to Italy quite late, around 1965, when the media coined the derogatory term *capellone* (long-haired) to deride their look. An article in the main national newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* even urged good citizens to ‘solve the problem’ by approaching the *capelloni* with insecticide and scissors.¹⁵³ Finally, in Italy too, young people were influenced by the beats’ anti-systemic critique, which prepared the ground for the tumultuous years that historian Peppino Ortoleva called ‘the explosive phase’ – the late-1960s.¹⁵⁴

In Britain, the pacifism of the beats took them into Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).¹⁵⁵ Within a couple of years, it went from the 5,000 at Central Hall Westminster, London, in 1958 to 100,000 people filling Trafalgar Square after the Aldermaston march of 1960.¹⁵⁶ However, when CND leaders opened to an indifferent Labour party, several militants joined the new and more radical Committee of 100 – the wing of the movement that employed direct action tactics, such as sit-down demonstrations. Anarchist theorist David Wieck defined direct action as that ‘action which ... *realises the end desired*, so far as this lies within one’s power’, as opposed to delegating it to others.¹⁵⁷ The Committee strategy was that of non-violent civil disobedience which replicated the ‘anarchistic spirit of decentralism, direct action ... , propaganda of the deed, non-cooperation with unjust laws and symbolic revolution’.¹⁵⁸ By providing a meeting point for young people interested in socio-political issues, it actively contributed to disseminating anarchist theory and practice among a wider public.¹⁵⁹ In fact, CND pumped new life into the British post-war anarchist movement – a 1965-66 survey amongst CND and young CND members confirmed that seven and ten per cent respectively had become anarchist after joining the Campaign.¹⁶⁰

The fact that many of these ‘new’ anarchists were students had a profound effect on the constitution of the British anarchist movement. It almost completely detached itself from its working-class roots, as a 1962 survey confirmed: 85% of readers of the historical anarchist newspaper *Freedom* were white-collar workers, especially teachers and students.¹⁶¹ Strengthening this relationship between the anarchist movement and the new, young and politicised middle-class was the magazine *Anarchy* (1961-70). After being editor of *Freedom* for over twenty years, Colin

¹⁵³ Paolo Bugialli, ‘Tempi Duri per I ‘Capelloni’ Che Bivaccano a Trinità’ Dei Monti’, *Corriere Della Sera*, 6 November 1965, 3.

¹⁵⁴ Peppino Ortoleva, *Saggio Sui Movimenti Del ‘68 in Europa E in America* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1988), 71, 72.

¹⁵⁵ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed up* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 26–40.

¹⁵⁶ ‘1960: Thousands Protest against H-Bomb’, *BBC News*, 18 April 1960, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/18/newsid_2909000/2909881.stm.

¹⁵⁷ David Wieck in: Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ Nigel Young, *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (London: RKP, 1977), 26.

¹⁵⁹ Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 55.

¹⁶⁰ Franks, 54, 55.

¹⁶¹ Franks, 57.

Ward founded and edited *Anarchy* aiming at introducing to anarchism the generation that had benefited of the changes in the British education to become the new middle-class.¹⁶² Ward applied anarchist ideas to themes not covered by previous libertarian publications, such as city planning and education, and also covered topics from theoretical reflections on anarchism to trade unionism, from education to squatting, and also environmentalism.¹⁶³ However, some class-struggle anarchists dismissed Ward's turn as 'revisionist anarchism [that] prioritised protest rather than revolution'.¹⁶⁴

In Italy too, for the first time since the war, many young people entered the anarchist movement. Their need for an autonomous space led to the creation of a separate youth federation in 1965, affiliated to the main national anarchist federation, *Federazione Anarchica Italiana* (FAI, Italian Anarchist Federation).¹⁶⁵ Young anarchists kept increasing in number and carried out an incisive role within the movement by putting it in touch with masses of students and introducing new generational issues.¹⁶⁶ This marked the beginning of a new phase for the anarchist movement, as the old principles of classical anarchism were no longer 'viable or attractive' to this generation of educated rebels. As Carl Levy noted: 'Industrial or agrarian anarchism was replaced by postmaterialist, ecological, or postmodern anarchism. The celebration of science was replaced by a jaundiced or dismissive attitude toward science and technology'.¹⁶⁷ Anarchism was almost extinct after Spanish civil war and Second World War, but the libertarianism of 1960s regenerated the anarchist movement as a part of the new social movements.

If the post-war socio-economic changes and the spreading of countercultures had paved the way for the politicisation of young people, mainstream politics played its role in the radicalisation of youth. In the 1960s, many had placed their trust in the institutional Left, hoping the system could be reformed from within, but the experiences of British Labour (1964-70) and Italian Centre-Left (1963-74) governments turned multitudes of disillusioned into radicals. For instance, in 1976, the Trotskyist writer David Widgery noticed that once the Labour prime minister Wilson came to power, 'the optimistic illusions that his diffuse radicalism had encouraged were turned inside out'.¹⁶⁸ Large groups of socialist students moved towards the revolutionary sector, which resulted in Marxist socialist societies growing into the main left-wing university organisations. Marxist intellectuals, like the historian E. P. Thompson, founded the British New Left as an answer to the Communist Party of Great Britain's (CPGB) confused response to the events of 1956 – Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes, and the Soviet

¹⁶² Carl Levy, ed., *Colin Ward. Life, Times and Thought* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2013), 8, 9.

¹⁶³ For a selection of the topics treated by *Anarchy*: Colin Ward, ed., *A Decade of Anarchy (1961-1970)* (London: Freedom Press, 1987).

¹⁶⁴ Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 57.

¹⁶⁵ Adriana Dadà, *L'anarchismo in Italia: Tra Movimento E Partito. Storia E Documenti Dell'anarchismo Italiano* (Milano: Teti, 1984), 117–24.

¹⁶⁶ Franco Schirone, *La Gioventù Anarchica Negli Anni Delle Contestazioni 1965-1969* (Milano: Zeroincondotta, 2006), 31, 32.

¹⁶⁷ Levy, 'Social Histories of Anarchism', 5.

¹⁶⁸ David Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-68* (Penguin Books, 1976), 151.

invasion of Hungary. Built around a series of clubs and a journal (*New Left Review*), the British New Left was tolerant of counterculture, and open to new revolutionary actors such as students, women and new immigrants from the Commonwealth. This contrasted with the Old Left parties they perceived as authoritarian, obsessed with the myth of the working class, closed to deviations from the 'sole orthodox model'.¹⁶⁹

The scholar Grant Farred noted that New Left 'redefined politics through its challenge to and scepticism about the prevailing top-down communist orthodoxy', and that it 'was determinedly anti-Party bureaucracy and committed to renovating and democratizing the socialist project'. Nonetheless, Farred admitted that the British New Left 'retained its links to formal political institutions such as the Labour Party', as did its American counterpart with the US Democratic Party.¹⁷⁰ British revolutionary youths rejected in fact the so-called New Left, which they deemed 'a dynamizing Left Centre to the putative Centre-Left of Wilson'.¹⁷¹ Similarly, in Italy, neither the biggest communist party of the West (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) nor the 'semi-New Left' embodied by the much smaller socialist party (PSI) attracted young people.¹⁷² Lucy Robinson noted that the Left-wing parties were ambivalent towards the youth: 'On the whole the Left wanted young people's subscriptions and footwork, but it did not want young people's differing political agendas'.¹⁷³ Masses of students thus left those parties both in Britain and in Italy to approach autonomous student organisations and extra-parliamentary forces.¹⁷⁴ In fact, historian Paul Ginsborg identified the failure of the 'French May' as the origin of the 'real' Italian new Left.¹⁷⁵ This consisted of Leninist groups, who deemed discipline essential to overcome anarchist spontaneity and resist state repression. Thus, it was really 'not new at all', although its revolutionary groups, taken together, were the largest New Left in Europe.¹⁷⁶

Cultural and political tendencies coexisted for a long time within the British and Italian counterculture of late-1960s to mid-1970s, and were both highly heterogeneous. The former was characterised by its anti-consumerist, pacifist, cynicism-free and 'playful-mystical' model, and was mostly constituted of hippies. The latter were the so-called 'politicos'. Hippies emerged in the mid-1960s in the United States and emphasised the concepts of tolerance, love for all human beings, complete honesty about their feelings and a religious-philosophical synthesis of Eastern,

¹⁶⁹ Young, *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left*, 310.

¹⁷⁰ Grant Farred, 'Endgame Identity? Mapping the New Left Roots of Identity Politics', *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (2000): 628.

¹⁷¹ Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-68*, 151.

¹⁷² After 1956 it was the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) that took on the role of 'critical Left' in Italy. It interrupted its relationship with both the PCI and the Soviet Union, and started a cooperation with the centrist DC (Democrazia Cristiana) that finally led to the first formal centre-left government in the republican history.

¹⁷³ Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 30.

¹⁷⁴ Paola Ghione, 'L'Emergere Della Conflittualità Giovanile: Da Piazza Statuto a Paolo Rossi', in *Giovani Prima Della Rivolta*, ed. Paola Ghione and Marco Grispigni (Roma: Il Manifesto Libri, 1998), 121.

¹⁷⁵ French students and workers – united for the first time on a national scale – had paralysed the country with general strikes and demonstrations. However, their eviction of occupied factories and universities, and the following electoral defeat of the Left, convinced many students and young workers that disciplined Leninist groups were necessary to lead the revolutionary vanguard (students and workers) to victory.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 298–316.

American Indian and mystical traditions.¹⁷⁷ The number of beat/hippie/underground magazines of that period is emblematic of the richness of the countercultural scene – 123 in Italy alone between 1965 and 1976.¹⁷⁸ 78-year-old journalist and former squatter Mary Finnigan identified herself with this component, which had also another characteristic – the consumption of drugs. Hippies often used mind-altering drugs to explore and expand their spirituality. She claimed: ‘There was a very anarchic movement in London ... that had started in ’66-’67 with the psychedelic revolution, when ordinary people ... had access to psychotropic drugs’.¹⁷⁹ The ‘politicos’, on the other hand, were the more explicitly political part of the counterculture, as it encompassed a plurality of far-Left parties and groups covering all declinations of socialism, communism and anarchism. These groups mushroomed in schools, universities and workplaces, as they continuously formed, merged, split, and dissolved. Most shared a libertarian outlook, with a preference for cooperation over competition, communalism over individualism, and autonomy over obedience’.¹⁸⁰ However, Mary mentioned also the presence of groups along the lines of the Italian Leninist-Trotskyist ‘new Left’: ‘I found [the International Socialists] quite alarmingly authoritarian, and that was not what we were up for. The same thing for the Trotskyites: hierarchical and very narrow in their vision’.¹⁸¹

After the initial preponderance of beats and hippies within the counterculture, the political faction spread and challenged the establishment in a more direct way.¹⁸² However, the boundaries between the two parts were not so defined. In fact, there was a whole grey area – or rather, colourful area – of politically-aware hippies like Mary: ‘I ended up in Buddhism, but really had a foot in both camps because I was quite politically aware as well’. According to her, this was another effect of drug consumption:

LSD moved the goalpost radically in many directions because suddenly lots and lots and lots of people had awakenings to the serious defects in the social order – that we were basically wage-slaves ... You go to school, you go to university, you get married, you have children, you get a job, you get a mortgage, you get grandchildren, then you end up in an old people’s home, and then you die. And that’s it. We threw all that out of the window in the Sixties.¹⁸³

Such awareness led to forms of direct action, as in the case of squatting – ‘a huge movement of radical youth that gave two fingers to the establishment’ – while others even ‘formed communities

¹⁷⁷ Lawrence D. Wieder and Don H. Zimmerman, ‘Becoming a Freak: Pathways into the Counter-Culture’, *Youth and Society* 7, no. 3 (March 1976): 312.

¹⁷⁸ Matteo Guarnaccia, *Underground Italiana. Gli Anni Gioiosamente Ribelli Della Controcultura* (Milano-Rimini: Shake Edizioni, 2011), 9–12.

¹⁷⁹ Mary Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London, 7 February 2016.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Flacks, *Youth and Social Change* (Chicago: Markham, 1971), 129. Another example of fragmentation is that between a majority that believed a generic better society would inevitably arise, should the dominant structure be removed, and organised minorities that aimed at a communistic society. James L. Spates, ‘Counterculture And Dominant Culture Values: A Cross-National Analysis Of The Underground Press And Dominant Culture Magazines’, *American Sociological Review* 41, no. 5 (1976): 870.

¹⁸¹ Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London.

¹⁸² Green, *All Dressed up*, 113.

¹⁸³ Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London.

in rural areas because they really didn't want anything at all to do with mainstream society'.¹⁸⁴ Countercultures had introduced – intentionally or not – masses of young people to traditional anarchist practices like antiauthoritarianism, direct action, and self-management because – as Murray Bookchin argued – anarchist notions possess the power 'to persist throughout history in one form or another'.¹⁸⁵ This favoured their transition towards anarchist groups. Such transitions were often facilitated by anarchist militants and newspapers encountered during demonstrations and meetings. Important was also the network of radical bookshops, which helped the rediscovery and circulation of Marxist and anarchist texts. Students and intellectuals found in Marxism an interpretative device and tactical tool, rather than a set of dogmas, and in anarchism a source of theoretical and practical references, such as Kropotkin's theory on mutual-aid and the organisation of communities during the Spanish civil war.

Another factor helping the circulation of countercultural ideas among young Britons and Italians was the reform of the British and Italian national educational systems. Britain had founded the so-called 'new universities' campuses (1961-65) such as Sussex, and Italy had abolished the university entrance exams (1965), which allowed a mass of middle and working-class youths into higher education.¹⁸⁶ However, overcrowded classes and lack of high-profile jobs produced a sense of frustration and alienation that made the universities fertile ground for countercultural and libertarian ideas.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, the secluded nature of many campuses made it easier for the students to spend more time together and exchange such ideas. Finally, a whole generation of libertarians was urged to action in 1968 by songs, newscasts and magazines spreading the images of the escalation of the Vietnam war, the propaganda of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, principles of the US social movements, updates on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and news of strikes and occupations from France.

1.2 1968: The failed revolution that radicalised the libertarians

It was with the student protests of 1968 that this politicised youth became really aware of its potential. Students around the world began taking to the streets to demonstrate against the Vietnam war, and authoritarian political and education systems, and then 'moved on to revolution'.¹⁸⁸ Political commentators like Robert McKenzie spoke of a transnational student class, and student leader Tariq Ali presented universities as the centres of revolutionary protest. This was a protest that soon spilled from the safety of universities as non-conformist strongholds,

¹⁸⁴ Finnigan.

¹⁸⁵ Murray Bookchin, 'New Social Movements. The Anarchic Dimension', in *For Anarchism. History, Theory, and Practice*, ed. David Goodway (London, New York: Routledge, 1989), 272.

¹⁸⁶ This is compared to early-1960s when, in Britain, 'only about a quarter of university entrants belonged to the working class, and fewer than a third were women'. Edward Royle, *Modern Britain : A Social History, 1750-1997*, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 1997), 388, 389.

¹⁸⁷ '[A] small segment of college youth who were among the most intelligent and open-minded began to question the dominant values ... the work ethic, and reality of the affluent consumer society ... seen as the basis of alienation and malaise'. Block and Langman, 'Youth and Work: "The Diffusion of 'Countercultural' Values"', 414, 415.

¹⁸⁸ Tariq Ali, 'Where Has All the Rage Gone?', *The Guardian*, 22 March 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/mar/22/vietnamwar>.

and took to the streets and squares, thus involving masses of ‘regular’ people.¹⁸⁹ Despite the transnational aspect, the 1968 protests were characterised by national and regional idiosyncrasies, like the strong aversion towards the United States among the European youth, whereas US music and clothes helped the youth of the Eastern bloc voice their dissent. Among Western countries too differences emerged, and Italy and Britain represent two distinctive examples of 1968 protests. Numerous Italian students, for instance, adhered to extra-parliamentarian groups and organised protests and occupations that sought to transcend the gap with the workers. Episodes that climaxed with the long wave of strikes of 1969, dubbed *Autunno caldo* (Hot Autumn). Whereas, Holger Nehring described the British 1968 as less ‘iconic’, as it was mainly characterised by anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in London with most protesters connected to mainstream politics.

Though Britain was the only major industrialised society without widespread student unrest, the libertarian wave of the late-1960s paved the way for the development of social movements.¹⁹⁰ The British Black Power Movement started forming in 1967, following the speech of US Black Panther’s Stokely Carmichael at the famous Dialectics of Liberation Congress at the Roundhouse in London; a national conference in Oxford marked the foundation of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) in 1970; the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was created the same year during a meeting in the basement of the London School of Economics; and environmentalism becoming a new social movement with the first edition of *The ecologist* magazine in 1970 and the creation of the British branch of Friends of the Earth (FOE) in 1971.¹⁹¹ Instrumental for the development of such movements was the spreading of anarchistic ideas throughout the 1960s. Anarchism – unlike classical Marxism – regarded oppression in wider terms than simply as economic and political. Therefore, each and all oppressed categories could be revolutionary subjects, rather than just the industrial proletariat. For these reasons students, women, gays, and ethnic minorities gradually became self-conscious about their revolutionary role.¹⁹²

Students played a fundamental role in the renovation and revival of anarchism in both Britain and Italy. While British anarchism opened up to new themes, Italian anarchists mainly supported the coming together of students’ and workers’ struggles as a strategy to overcome the failure of 1968 students’ protests.¹⁹³ Students and workers developed a relation of mutual support that led to the 1969 strikes and demonstrations of *Autunno caldo*. This did not happen in Britain where, as Green sarcastically noticed, ‘the only time British workers marched with any real

¹⁸⁹ Juliane Fürst, Piotr Oseka, and Chris Reynolds, ‘Breaking the Walls of Privacy: How Rebellion Came to the Street’, *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 4 (2011): 493–512.

¹⁹⁰ Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, 1–9, 83–96, 125–36.

¹⁹¹ Brendan Prendiville, ‘British Environmentalism: A Party in Movement?’, *LISA E-Journal* XII, no. 8 (2014), <http://lisa.revues.org/7119>.

¹⁹² The international events of the late-1960s strengthened the refusal of the working class as the only revolutionary agent. For example, ‘[t]he events in Vietnam and Central America produced interest in the peasantry in countries under colonial rule’. Protagonists of worldwide social movements became students, women, gays, blacks and Asians, etc. Feminism, in particular, played a fundamental role in unmasking the hierarchy and oppression that radical, and even anarchist, groups tended to replicate. Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 58–60.

¹⁹³ The Italian anarchist movement managed to recover and start again, and to create ‘that connection with the working class that [the movement] had longed for in the 1950s and 1960s’. Dadà, *L’anarchismo in Italia: Tra Movimento E Partito. Storia E Documenti Dell’anarchismo Italiano*, 124.

enthusiasm was to back their beloved Enoch Powell'.¹⁹⁴ The reactionary answer to the *Autunno caldo* was even stronger than the French one – on 12 December 1969, sixteen people died and eighty-eight were wounded following the explosion of a bomb in a bank in Piazza Fontana, in the centre of Milan. The same day two other bombs exploded in Rome wounding eighteen people. This became the first of a series of acts of terror that characterised the period between 1969 and early 1980s, also known as *Anni di piombo* (Years of Lead). Ginsborg showed that anarchists were immediately, and unjustly, accused of these and other attacks, while often neo-fascists and sections of the secret services were probably involved in attempts to replicate the Greek military coup of 1967.¹⁹⁵

The Piazza Fontana terror attack ushered in the *Strategia della tensione* (Strategy of Tension) – a series of far-right and far-left terrorist actions that legitimised, in the eyes of the public opinion, a new phase of state repression. With the failure of the 'French May', a small but increasing part of the radical Left – including anarchists – chose to undertake the armed 'path to revolution'.¹⁹⁶ They elaborated this choice following reflections on what appeared to them as the inefficacy of pacifism, and on the demystification of violence presented by some countercultural intellectuals, who defined several aspects of mainstream society as 'bourgeois violence'.¹⁹⁷ Many communist armed groups appeared in Europe, and especially in Italy. Notorious were the Italian *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) and the German *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction), while Britain's Angry Brigade had the peculiarity of being composed of anarchists.¹⁹⁸

In Italy, state repression enabled the temporary suppression of the growing libertarian movement but, as the anarchist writer Massimo Varengo argued: 'If the Milan massacre had had as an objective the dispersion of anarchism, its result was the opposite. When the reactionary origin of the bombs was clear, the movement attracted new and numerous activists ... It reached a visibility unprecedented since the post-war period'.¹⁹⁹ Of these, many were students, who joined and founded new groups because they saw the anarchist movement 'as the most coherent heir of the events of May [1968]'. In fact, the youths at the 1971 national conference of the FAI had risen

¹⁹⁴ Green, *All Dressed up*, 243.

Seemingly spontaneous marches of workers supported the xenophobic conservative MP Powell who, in his infamous Rivers of blood speech, distanced himself from the Race Relations Act 1968 (measures to prevent racial discrimination) and rhetorically reversed reality by presenting the 'native' Britons as those threatened by a multitude of immigrants. See: 'Race Relations Act 1968' (1968), http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1968/71/pdfs/ukpga_19680071_en.pdf; 'Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" Speech', 6 November 2007, sec. Comment, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.

This episode also represents a major difference between the British and Italian societies of 1960s, as Italy was still characterised by emigration rather than immigration. It was only with the 1990s that the *extracomunitari* (non-EEC/EU immigrants) became 'a key issue in the political agenda'. See: Tiziana Caponio, '(Im)Migration Research in Italy: A European Comparative Perspective.', *The Sociological Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2008): 445–64.

¹⁹⁵ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 333–35.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Drake, 'Italy in the 1960s: A Legacy of Terrorism and Liberation', *South Central Review* 16, no. 4 (1999): 70, 71.

¹⁹⁷ Green, *All Dressed up*, 208.

¹⁹⁸ Unlike other terrorist groups, the Angry Brigade (1970–72) sought destruction of property only and saw their attacks as 'just another tactical method alongside more established industrial tactics'. Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 65–67.

¹⁹⁹ Massimo Varengo, '1968/1977 Un Decennio Davvero Rivoluzionario', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, Summer 2012, <http://www.arivista.org/?nr=373&pag=103.htm>.

to 80%, from 20% of 1968. This helped renovate a movement that appeared to young people as out-of-touch, ‘old ... [and] racking its brains about age-old dilemmas originated after the FAI split of 1965 and the legacy of the defeat in the Spanish civil war’.²⁰⁰ In Britain, meanwhile, the institutional pressure on the anarchist movement following the Angry Brigade attacks contributed to the new contraction of the libertarian area in the 1970s. Other factors for this were the closure of radical-countercultural magazines (such as the historical *IT* and *Oz*), the resurgence of traditional working-class opposition as an answer to the 1970 election of a Conservative government, and – paradoxically – the American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975, which removed one key reason for unity amongst radical groups.²⁰¹ Still, British and Italian libertarians kept challenging the establishment in ways that ranged from demonstrating in the streets to founding alternative communities.

2. Post-1968 urban communities

After the ‘ideological euphoria and eventual dashing of hopes of the 1968 “revolutionary moment”’, what remained was, in Chris Coates’ words, ‘a libertarian critique of the “supermarket society”’.²⁰² Inspired by 1960s American hippie communities, the Women’s Liberation Movement and emerging environmentalism, a growing number of libertarians sought in the creation of communes an alternative to traditional family and industrial productivity.²⁰³ Such communities generally had more limited objectives compared to those of the socialist colonies of the nineteenth century, as they had exchanged the concept of ‘salvation’ with that of ‘personal growth’. Their size too reflected the new focus on the individual, as the communards were rarely more than a dozen, and usually young.

2.1 Squats as social centres in 1970s Britain

The chronic lack of affordable houses had led to a new wave of squatting in Britain, where it was lawful at the time. This new wave – the first since the post-war years – started in Redbridge (north-east London) as a campaign to house local homeless families in 1968, and from 1969 squatting spread to the rest of London and Britain. British anarchists immediately supported ‘the new squatters’, as anarchist writer Nicolas Walter dubbed the people involved in the London Squatters Campaign in the issue that *Anarchy* dedicated to this subject. However, that was not the same spontaneous mass action as the one that involved forty thousand people after the war, as ‘instead of the Communists taking over a large movement, this time there are various kinds of anarchists, libertarian socialists and radicals starting a small one’. Walter highlighted the presence of two elements within the movement: the homeless (‘working-class and under-educated ... without shock-absorbers’) and the political activists (‘mostly middle-class’ and from ‘groupuscules’ of

²⁰⁰ Varengo.

²⁰¹ Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 67–70.

²⁰² Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 289.

²⁰³ Manuel Olivares, *Comuni, Comunità, Ecovillaggi* (London: Viverealtrimenti, 2010), 60, 61.

the libertarian Left via the Committee of 100). Those libertarian activists, like Ron Bailey and Jim Radford, proudly admitted that their objective was ‘to establish an example to follow’ by adopting direct action and propaganda by deed.²⁰⁴ According to Coates, by the end of 1973 there were 15,000 people squatting in London alone, with an estimated peak of 40,000-50,000 people by mid-1975. As many of the squatted properties belonged to local councils that kept them empty while they were awaiting redevelopment, most councils preferred to find arrangements with the squatters rather than starting expensive court cases.²⁰⁵

Reflecting back on this period, two of my research participants offered alternative perspectives on the internal dynamics of the movement. Ex-squatter Tom Osborn identified two main reasons for squatting: needing an accommodation and refusing the existing dominant culture. Generally, working-class people squatted for the former reason, while the middle-class for the latter. Sometimes, though, people started squatting out of necessity and, by doing so, discovered further political motivations. Despite the initial class division, Osborn believed that in squats people left their old social position behind, and this resulted in classless societies.²⁰⁶ However, a 70-year-old ex-squatter and anarchist who took pleasure in asking to be anonymised as Stropky Old Git, remarked that class division was still evident between those in need of an affordable accommodation and those he called ‘middle-class arty-farty wankers’.²⁰⁷ Whatever the motivation, squatting challenged mainstream ideas on private property and individualism, and squats often became hubs for countercultural and radical activities. Famous in London was the ‘Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Squatters Estate Agents’ that helped people find properties to squat. Coates mentioned squatted houses of ‘all shapes and sizes, shops, workshops, music venues, artists’ studios, cafes, allotments, city farms, bookshops, music centres’. Sometimes whole streets and neighbourhoods were squatted, and behaved like ‘decentralised urban self-managed communit[ies]’.²⁰⁸

Freston Road in Notting Hill (west London) is one of the best known examples of a whole area that became a ‘squatting community’. Josefine Speyer lived there. She remembered that residents of Freston Road squats ‘came and went’, but they were mostly students or ‘highly educated artist dropouts’ – as well as alcoholics, people with mental health issues, and drug dealers. Many, like Josefine’s late husband Nicholas Albery and the writer Heathcote Williams – who were also part of the Ruff Puff agency, considered themselves anarchists. Despite the presence of numerous self-defined anarchists, Josefine specified that people spent a lot of time talking of ‘music, art, philosophy, but no politics. You just saw that as a load of crap’.²⁰⁹ Although the Greater London Council (GLC) had offered Freston Road squatters alternative

²⁰⁴ Nicolas Walter, ‘The New Squatters’, *Anarchy*, August 1969.

²⁰⁵ Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 295.

²⁰⁶ Tom Osborn, ‘Outpost of a New Culture’, in *Squatting: The Real Story*, ed. Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar (London: Bay Leaf, 1980), 186.

²⁰⁷ Stropky Old Git, Interview on squatting in London, 5 March 2016.

²⁰⁸ Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 295.

²⁰⁹ Josefine Speyer, Interview on Frestonia, 9 February 2016.

accommodation under the 1977 amnesty, they all adopted the surname Bramley to avoid being divided and rehoused far from the area in which many worked and had developed close ties. They then unilaterally declared the independence from Great Britain as the Free Independent Republic of Frestonia.²¹⁰ Josefine underlined the role as ‘driving force’ of Albery, as ‘he persuaded everybody to create this independence from Britain ... [although] we stole energy from Britain and we were still part of Britain’.²¹¹ According to another former Frestonian, Shelley Assiter, ‘the whole thing was a publicity stunt. What people wanted was exposure and attention, because otherwise we were not being heard’. Her perception was that mainstream society treated squatters like them as ‘the lowest of the lowest’.²¹² Thanks to that ‘real good public relation exercise’, added Shelley, ‘people started paying attention ... we started having TV crews coming from places far out in the world’. Thus, they finally succeeded in being included in the council’s renovation projects of the area, and obtained the management of the new houses under the name of Bramley housing cooperative. They even managed to keep a communal garden at the centre, as they insisted on the importance of preserving their sense of community.²¹³

As claimed by Josefine, squatters generally preferred direct actions to political discussions. Stropky Old Git said that freedom from rent – and thus from a stable job to pay the rent – meant that squatters could use their time differently. He, for one, became involved in organisations that he deemed ‘anarchist in their whole politics’, such as the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS), the revolutionary libertarian group Big Flame, and – from the 1990s – the radical environmental group Earth First! and the direct action collective Reclaim The Streets (RTS). Squatters also had time to organise and defend their own interests as a movement, he added that in the 1970s:

In Tower Hamlets, Hackney, and Islington, for years there wasn’t a meeting of council housing committees ... at which squatters weren’t present, because squatters went to these fucking meetings, sat there, wrote notes, listened to what was going on. ... All that died away ... I think the squatters’ movement lost its capacity to ... leave muddy footprints in the corridors of power.²¹⁴

Squatting used to offer thousands of people the opportunity to cultivate their own interests and passions, as well as to discover and participate in the social and political life of their local and national communities. Things changed after the 1977 GLC amnesty offer to the 7,000 squatters occupying over 1,850 GLC properties because a great majority accepted rehousing or the regularisation of their position. The number of squatters dropped, and so did their capacity to resist evictions and ‘harass’ councils into releasing empty tenancies.²¹⁵ This affected also the role

²¹⁰ Wates and Wolmar, *Squatting. The Real Story*, 91–94.

²¹¹ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

²¹² Shelley Assiter, Interview on Frestonia, 25 February 2016.

²¹³ Assiter.

²¹⁴ Stropky Old Git, Interview on squatting in London.

²¹⁵ Wates and Wolmar, *Squatting. The Real Story*, 89.

that squatted streets and blocks had developed. Stropky Old Git explained that, throughout the 1970s, ‘they functioned as social centres, with loads of things going on, according to people’s interests. All sort of stuff happened in squatted streets, like Huntley Street. It depended on who was there. Including just hanging out, street parties’. Squats thus embodied the social and political functions of social centres before the appearance of social centres as such. They were places that offered a space to meet, socialise, and develop as an activist. Therefore, he continued: ‘The need for social centres only really arose when people [became] more scattered and you [didn’t] have focal points [anymore]’.²¹⁶

2.2 Italian neighbourhood committees: Precursors of social centres

After the disappointment for the failure of the 1968 revolutionary moment, many Italian young workers and students turned to radical bookshops and press to identify and analyse the causes. By doing so, a ‘substantial part of the rebel youth’ rediscovered anarchist authors like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin.²¹⁷ Among the many publications and re-publications of those years were the 1953 *Manifesto of Libertarian Communism* by the French anarchist Georges Fontenis, and the *Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communism* of 1926.²¹⁸ Authors of the latter were anarchists like Nestor Makhno, Pyotr Arshinov and Ida Mett, who fled to France after the Bolshevik revolution. The Platform was first translated into Italian by anarchist groups in 1973, thus introducing a larger public to the topic of libertarian communism, but also to Makhno and the Ukrainian libertarian communities.²¹⁹

The experience of Makhno and the Platform inspired, among the others, a group of young Italian anarchists who undertook an intense social and political activity in a working-class district of Bari (southern Italy). They founded or participated in neighbourhood committees across the Apulia region.²²⁰ In its capital, Bari, they participated in the management of the San Pasquale neighbourhood committee between 1974 and its closure in the late 1970s, but they were also in the university-based *Movimento Studenti Fuori Sede* (Non-residential Students’ Movement, MSFS), and involved in union activism.²²¹ The Platform distinguished between ‘specific organisation’ (the political group) and ‘mass organisation’, such as neighbourhood committees and student associations, in which anarchist militants could cooperate with working-class people ‘to realise ... the social revolution’.²²² In addition, they had rediscovered Malatesta’s ‘gradualism’, his idea that: ‘[s]ince one cannot convert all the people at once ... , it is necessary

²¹⁶ Stropky Old Git, Interview on squatting in London.

²¹⁷ Varengo, ‘1968/1977 Un Decennio Davvero Rivoluzionario’.

²¹⁸ Georges Fontenis, *Manifesto Del Comunismo Libertario* (Fano: Alternativa Libertaria, 2011); Nestor McNab, ed., *La Piattaforma Organizzativa Dei Comunisti Anarchici* (Giovane Talpa, 2007).

²¹⁹ Gino Cerrito, *Il Ruolo Dell’organizzazione Anarchica: L’efficientismo Organizzativo, Il Problema Della Minoranza, Il Periodo Transitorio, Classismo E Umanesimo* (Catania: RL, 1973).

²²⁰ Comitato di quartiere San Pasquale, ‘Bollettino Interno Del Comitato Di Quartiere San Pasquale’, April 1976.

²²¹ Lapolla, *Gli anarchici di piazza Umberto. La sinistra libertaria a Bari negli anni Settanta.*, 85–148.

²²² Convegno Nazionale dei Lavoratori Anarchici, ‘I CNLA Bulletin’, 1973.

to find a way to realise as much anarchy as possible amidst people who are not anarchist'.²²³ On these theoretical bases, in 1971 they set up a coordinating organisation with other regional groups: the Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese (Apulian Anarchist Organisation, OAP), later Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica (Anarchist Revolutionary Organisation, ORA).²²⁴ In 1978, ORA became a nationwide anarcho-communist federation, which they saw as the necessary political counterpart to an ideal network of mass organisations.

OAP/ORA militants saw themselves as 'the most conscientious part of the proletariat', whose goal was to 'help proletarians raise their consciousness' in order to achieve 'the self-management of the territory and its resources by the proletariat'.²²⁵ Hence, they undertook an 'intense activity, especially in [working-class] neighbourhoods and in the school-university', where they entered student associations and *comitati di quartiere* (CdQ, neighbourhood committees).²²⁶ The latter were to them the grassroots alternative to local councils, which they depicted as 'structures created from above, ... [where] there is always somebody ... who decides for [the citizens]'.²²⁷ Instead, they wanted 'class autonomy, that is the possibility and ability of the proletariat to manage – with no technical or bureaucratic or administrative mediation – its own struggles today, and tomorrow to produce and distribute social goods'.²²⁸ Hence, they deemed it necessary for the CdQ to 'connect with the class movement, thus having a vision that goes beyond the local problems and feeds into the broader anti-capitalist struggle; [and also to] connect with other neighbourhoods and mass organisations'.²²⁹ When in 1974 the young anarcho-communists moved to the working-class district of San Pasquale, they noticed the presence of the neighbourhood committee and decided to become actively involved as, although it was non-confrontational and limited to single-issue campaigns, they considered its 'contents and methods [as] objectively libertarian'.²³⁰ It had been founded in 1973 by local residents as a self-managed afterschool club. Local residents helped out, although not always and often without participating in assemblies. In general, it was mostly women because, as a local woman wrote in 1976, 'our husbands work'.²³¹ Overall, the San Pasquale neighbourhood committee was, to quote former OAP/ORA militant Nicola Laucelli, 'like a present-day social centre, but well-rooted in the neighbourhood'.²³²

²²³ Errico Malatesta, 'Il Possibilismo Anarchico', in *Rivoluzione E Lotta Quotidiana* (Torino: Edizioni Antistato, 1982), [http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ITA2048/_P1U.HTM#\\$1W](http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ITA2048/_P1U.HTM#$1W).

²²⁴ 'Dunque I Pinguini Volano', 1988. FAI expelled OAP for trying to turn it into an anarcho-communist organisation. The FAI instead adopted a synthesist organisational model that calls for an anarchism without adjectives, thus open to anarcho-syndicalists as well as individualists and anarcho-communists. 'Patto Associativo Della Federazione Anarchica Italiana (FAI)', Federazione Anarchica Italiana, accessed 16 March 2015, <http://www.federazioneanarchica.org/archivio/patto.html>.

²²⁵ Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese, 'Lotta Di Classe Nel Quartiere', 1974, 15, 14.

²²⁶ Dadà, *L'anarchismo in Italia: Tra Movimento E Partito. Storia E Documenti Dell'anarchismo Italiano*, 137.

²²⁷ Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica, 'Dibattito Politico 1 - I Consigli Di Quartiere', n.d.

²²⁸ Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese, 'Lotta Di Classe Nel Quartiere', 5, 6.

²²⁹ Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese, 14.

²³⁰ Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica, 'Dibattito Politico 1 - I Consigli Di Quartiere'.

²³¹ Comitato di quartiere San Pasquale, 'Bollettino Interno Del Comitato Di Quartiere San Pasquale'.

²³² Nicola Laucelli, Interview on OAP-ORA, 10 November 2009.

Like current social centres, they promoted events, such as concerts, theatre shows and film clubs. Their objective was to tackle the ‘cultural gap’ by producing a ‘proletarian culture’ that focused ‘on us rather than abstract things, on our daily problems at work, at home, in the neighbourhood’.²³³ But the anarchists also engaged with counter-informative and conscientiousness-raising activities amongst women and tenants. For instance, ex-activists Pina Buttiglione and Luciano Sepe remembered that local women ‘believed that a civil wedding wasn’t valid’, and ‘didn’t know that [abortion] was illegal: abortion was the normal contraceptive’ as women turned to *mammane* (traditional unauthorised midwives).²³⁴ So, they provided information on their bulletins, promoted a petition to legalise abortion, opened a free clinic for women, and organised weekly women-only meetings to ‘discuss their problems’.²³⁵ They used their duplicated bulletins, with their unpolished layout and explicative hand-drawn cartoons to ‘conduct an overall work of counter-information’, such as explaining changes in housing laws.²³⁶ This experience inspired the foundation of another CdQ in the nearby San Marcello district, which was a neighbouring working-class area with longstanding problems like sewage outflows and insufficient council flats.²³⁷ However, ‘the residents weren’t stimulated [so, militants] decided to close it’ and merge with CdQ San Pasquale.²³⁸

In 2009, I interviewed several former CdQ activists, who stated that ‘the participation of the residents was good’ in San Pasquale.²³⁹ People even became involved in episodes of direct action. Nicola recounted that to obtain a kindergarten, at first they ‘attend[ed] the meetings of the local council ... [and then] we occupied [Villa Camomilla] because it was abandoned. We started fixing it. Local residents occupied it with us’.²⁴⁰ Pina also declared that ‘we were a reference point [to local women]’ despite the hostility of some husbands towards clinic and women-only meetings.²⁴¹ Anarchist Salvatore Caggese even claimed that ‘there were some residents who started frequenting the [ORA]’. But Luciano’s interview and an anonymous testimony in a 1976 bulletin presented a different view: ‘some people consider the committee as an organisation to go to, to have their problems solved, without feeling involved in [its] life [because people] got used to ... delegat[ing]’.²⁴² Thus, what San Marcello activists wrote in 1977 can be applied to CdQ San Pasquale too, which ‘stopped being a mass organisation ... and only faced the problem of how to

²³³ Comitato di quartiere San Pasquale, ‘Bollettino Interno’, n.d.

²³⁴ Pina Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA, 6 July 2010; Luciano Sepe, Interview on OAP-ORA, 20 November 2009.

²³⁵ Abortion was finally legalised by the 1978 referendum. Comitato di quartiere San Pasquale, ‘Bollettino Interno’.

²³⁶ Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese, ed., ‘Bollettino Interno 2 - Lotta Di Classe Nel Quartiere’, 15 June 1974; See also: Comitati di quartiere rioni San Pasquale e San Marcello, ed., ‘Bollettino Interno - Edilizia’, 1978, Franco Salomone.

²³⁷ Comitato di quartiere San Marcello, ‘Bollettino Interno’, n.d.

²³⁸ Nucleo Promotore ‘Comitato di quartiere rione San Marcello’, ‘Untitled’, 8 September 1977.

²³⁹ Sepe, Interview on OAP-ORA; Laucelli, Interview on OAP-ORA.

²⁴⁰ Laucelli, Interview on OAP-ORA.

²⁴¹ Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA; Lapolla, *Gli anarchici di piazza Umberto. La sinistra libertaria a Bari negli anni Settanta.*, 76.

²⁴² Salvatore Caggese, Interview on OAP-ORA, 15 November 2009; Sepe, Interview on OAP-ORA; Comitato di quartiere San Pasquale, ‘Bollettino Interno Del Comitato Di Quartiere San Pasquale’.

involve the residents'.²⁴³ As another ex-ORA member, Genny Gadaleta Caldarola, admitted about a third CdQ: 'We were young and full of ideas, but we weren't inside the reality people lived in'.²⁴⁴ In fact, Pina spoke about the difficulty 'to propagate libertarian ideas ... in the proletarian world [where people have] fewer cultural instruments to understand these ideas, and they have urgent needs to satisfy instead'.²⁴⁵

The Barese neighbourhood committee acted as an *ante litteram* social centre. Like the British squatted streets, they sought to build a community that transcends the physical boundaries of the activist community – merging with the neighbourhood. In fact, in the case of CdQs, they sought to build a community transcending even the boundaries of activism, as they sought to involve and politicise local residents. San Pasquale neighbourhood committee even experienced issues that would later become typical of social centres. In particular, the testimonies of Genny and Pina show the difficulty for young and often middle-class activists to interact with working-class local residents. Libertarians generally struggled to politicise and involve them in the management of the communities, which often ended up as 'providers of services'. This is an issue I will further explore in the coming chapter.

2.3 Squats and social centres in 1970s Italy

British squats and Italian neighbourhood committees prefigured the existence of self-defined social centres, which evolved in mid-1970s northern Italy from squatted spaces. Unlike in Britain, squatting in Italy has always been against the law. Nonetheless, just like the British Vigilantes, Italian anarchists actively supported this practice. In its very first issue, in 1971, *A-Rivista* treated the housing problem and reported the arrest of four anarchists who were supporting thirty squatting families in Milan.²⁴⁶ The breadth of the Italian movement in the 1970s was probably the only one in Europe – together with the Dutch – keeping pace with the British. Due to the power to evict that the Italian police had (and still has), occupations tended to happen on a big scale as people sought safety in numbers. Many squatters were immigrant workers, who often arrived in the industrialised cities of north Italy – like Milan and Turin – coming from the impoverished south of the country.²⁴⁷

Squatting thus became common in big cities, especially in the north, and in university towns like Rome, Bologna and Florence. Students were in fact particularly active in squatting empty buildings as they too were in need of affordable accommodations. They were much more than a roof over the head, as squatters met and organised social, cultural and political initiatives. One of the first and most famous examples was the squatted Hotel Commercio in piazza Fontana in Milan, renamed *Casa dello Studente e del Lavoratore* (Student's and Worker's House), occupied between 1968 and 1969. In 2015, I met in Milan with one of the former occupiers, Erri,

²⁴³ Nucleo Promotore 'Comitato di quartiere rione San Marcello', 'Untitled'.

²⁴⁴ Genny Gadaleta Caldarola, Interview on OAP-ORA, 11 July 2010.

²⁴⁵ Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA.

²⁴⁶ 'La Lotta per La Casa', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, February 1971, http://www.arivista.org/?nr=001&pag=1_11.htm.

²⁴⁷ Mark Gimson, 'Everybody's Doing It', in *Squatting: The Real Story*, ed. Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar (Bay Leaf, 1980), 216–18.

who today is a 75-year-old anarcho-syndicalist. He told me proudly how ‘everything [was] self-managed ... by general assemblies’, but then added with a smirk: ‘We [anarchists] conquered the majority’ within the former hotel. A statement that revealed the existence of informal power struggles among different extra-parliamentarian components within the apparently libertarian and egalitarian squat. The existence of informal hierarchies is also an ongoing issue in libertarian communities, and I investigate it in Chapter Four. In this particular instance, what helped anarchists become ‘an important reference point’ was their participation in the struggles at Fiat factory and their involvement in the street theatre with the group Dioniso that ‘strengthened neighbourhood struggles for the right to housing’ through provocative plays.²⁴⁸

The genesis of Italian social centres is rooted in the crisis of representativeness of the post-1968 extra-parliamentary groups of the Left, due to their rigid top-down Leninist and Maoist structures. Libertarian organisations like *circoli giovanili* (youth clubs), neighbourhood committees, gay and feminist collectives, and anarchist groups supported then the occupations of abandoned buildings in working-class areas. They were a systematic and strategic answer to the absence of social services such as libraries, cinemas, kindergartens, after-school clubs. Apart from providing services, these occupied spaces also supported local struggles, like self-reductions and rent strikes, and the research for a communal, egalitarian and non-hierarchical way of life.²⁴⁹ Therefore, while the Communist Party of Great Britain actively supported the occupation of luxury flats in west London in 1946, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) condemned the squatters and called them ‘enemies of the working class’.²⁵⁰ The PCI, like all traditional parties, feared the decentralised and fluid model represented by squats. In fact, extra-parliamentary and revolutionary groups often used squats as their bases, particularly those that openly identified themselves with the libertarian ideology.

By the end of 1977 Milan alone counted around 50 social centres, with 5,000 to 7,000 people participating in their self-managed activities.²⁵¹ Social centres were mostly squatted buildings such as abandoned factories, disused schools, former mental institutions and prisons. They were very large spaces in comparison with the British squats, especially after the 1977 GLC amnesty. Italian social centres often hosted alternative shops and community centres and, after the end of state monopoly on broadcasting in 1976, also radio stations (in 1977 there were already 1200). The free radios had a massive role in spreading the music and ideas of the radical counterculture that heavily influenced the Movement of 1977. Occupiers were mainly in their 20s and from dormitory suburbs, but their political and cultural background varied greatly. It included anarchists, punks, environmentalists, street artists, and unemployed people. They worked together to turn those authoritarian symbols of dominant society – like schools and prisons – into ‘public spaces’ in which the population of the surrounding deprived areas could have their needs satisfied.

²⁴⁸ Erri, Interview on Milanese libertarian communities, 27 January 2015.

²⁴⁹ ‘Dossier Centri Sociali’, 8,9.

²⁵⁰ Gimson, ‘Everybody’s Doing It’, 216–18.

²⁵¹ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 382.

Among the activities organised by the social centres were (and still are) language courses, homework clubs, art laboratories, free meals, advice and support services for drug addicts. Such initiatives helped social centres take root across the national territory (a 1994 survey counted over 100 existing *centri sociali*), even though their number varied greatly in different periods due to the many evictions and (re)occupations occurring.²⁵²

Aware of this precarious situation, some social centres elaborated different strategies to survive. Some gave in to compromises with the local authorities in order to save their social and political activity. One of the first and longest-living Italian social centres is the *Leoncavallo* in Milan. Established in 1975, it slowly went from a hard-line Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito (CSOA, Self-managed occupied social centre) to a legalised 'self-managed public space'. Thus, it was able to continue organising concerts, theatre shows, exhibitions, free-meals and short-term hospitality for the homeless, and free legal advice for migrants.²⁵³ Other social centres openly challenged local authorities. Since the 1990s, many have drawn inspiration from Hakim Bey's idea of 'Temporary Autonomous Zones' (TAZs) – the embodiment of a never-ending indirect guerrilla war against the State: a collective liberates an area, then dissolves before the State can crush it only to reappear somewhere or sometime else.²⁵⁴ Finally, other social centres have simply resisted attempted evictions, and re-occupied after each one. An example of this is the Conchetta/Cox18 social centre in Milan. I spoke about that experience with Pino – a 61-year-old nurse and union representative who was among the anarchists that occupied two derelict estates in the neighbouring streets of Torricelli and Conchetta in the Ticinese area in 1976. He still remembers that the Ticinese and other Milanese areas were unsafe in the mid-1970s, with their old overcrowded flats and empty derelict buildings with external shared toilets and without water or heating.²⁵⁵

A-Rivista immediately greeted the first Milanese occupations inspired and carried out entirely by anarchists with a detailed article outlining its aims and methods: a three-storey block of flats at via Conchetta 18 and a four-storey building with a series of stores on via Torricelli. Antonio M., member of the anarchist group *Bandiera Nera* (Black Flag), explained that their aim was both to provide housing for destitute families and to give local anarchist groups a place to meet. All Conchetta occupiers, anarchists and non-anarchists, set up and managed a social centre in the same building, and agreed on a set of libertarian principles to regulate their communal life.²⁵⁶ The squat in Via Torricelli housed nine families – mostly immigrants from southern Italy – and a social centre that started a libertarian propaganda by organising activities like the

²⁵² Adinolfi et al., *Comunità Virtuali. I Centri Sociali In Italia*, 28–85.

²⁵³ Andrea Membretti, 'Centro Sociale Leoncavallo', *European Urban and Regional Studies* 14, no. 3 (2007): 255–66.

²⁵⁴ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. Zone Temporaneamente Autonome* (Milano: Shake Edizioni, 1993), 14.

²⁵⁵ Pino, Interview on Milan social centres, 27 January 2015.

²⁵⁶ Editorial Staff, 'La Casa È Di Chi L'abita', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, Summer 1976, http://www.arivista.org/?nr=050&pag=50_03.htm.

screening of a film on the Spanish revolution and the opening of a 'barter shop'.²⁵⁷ Although in two different streets, Pino – who had been living in Milan but had migrated from the South – remembers that initially Conchetta and Torricelli were managed as a single occupation by the same anarchist collective that was not part of an official organisation. Many members lived there too, and others in the nearby disused factory of Via Correggio.

The collective was composed of young anarchists without families, mostly working in hospitals, and involved in hospital 'struggle committees'. Others were employed at the airport, in commerce or at the local council. They were a minority and the only politicised part in the occupation committee, while the others were all residents: defaulting tenants, immigrant proletarian families from the South and 'communes' of students.²⁵⁸ They had to apply for accommodation and were added to a self-managed waiting lists. Pino stated that they did so because people would squat anyway because housing is a necessity: 'In Milan, the occupations were carried out by individuals or by giving money to the Ndrangheta or Mafia'. However, the occupation committee had no means to carry out a background check on the applicants. Therefore, even though those spaces had been declared 'hard-drug free', Pino recalls a few cases in which the assembly had to expel drug dealers. Also, he remembers somebody not appreciating being thrown out and reacting with exploding two kilos of TNT outside the social centre in the early 1980s.²⁵⁹ This episode demonstrates the potential fragility of libertarian communities lacking political homogeneity, as in Conchetta and Torricelli coexisted people who squatted out of necessities and those who mostly visited the occupied space for political reasons. Similar class-based internal tensions became endemic in later social centres-*cum*-squats, as I illustrate in Chapter Four.

Pino and the other activists set up self-managed groups of workers and students on the premises of Conchetta, Torricelli and Correggio. At Conchetta, in particular, there were meetings of the housing committee, the libertarian students and workers' committee, and healthcare workers' committee. The last two later contributed to the re-foundation of the historical anarchist union *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI). Particularly important was the healthcare workers' committee, founded by Pino and his comrades/colleagues where a tattoo studio now stands. The committee was frequented by the remarkable number of thirty to forty hospital workers every day. In fact, he added: 'Our '68 was in those years: '75, '76, '77, '78, when the struggles spread to workplaces besides the factories'.²⁶⁰ Thanks to the meeting space provided by social centres, workers became systematically involved in grassroots wildcat strikes, sabotage actions, violent demonstrations and clashes with the police at the summit of the Years of Lead, which saw violence become an integral part of the political discourse.

²⁵⁷ Editorial Staff, 'Occupazioni Di Case E Scambio Libero', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, October 1976, http://www.arivista.org/?nr=051&pag=51_01.htm.

²⁵⁸ Cox 18, Archivio Primo Moroni, and Calusca City Lights, *Storia Di Un'autogestione* (Milano: Colibri, 2010), 18.

²⁵⁹ Pino, Interview on Milan social centres.

²⁶⁰ Pino.

This atmosphere contributed to the birth of the *Autonomia* (Autonomism) – one of the two (incompatible) souls that formed the Movement of 1977. The Movement shared a philosophy of life characterised by the ‘refusal of work’. This distanced itself from the Marxist tradition celebrating the factory worker for his hard-work (as opposed to the parasitic nature of the capitalist). Students for instance prolonged their studies and practised self-reductions to avoid having to find a job. One part of the Movement combined hippie-countercultural trends and new social movements’ elements. They were ‘creative’, sympathetic to feminist discourse, ironic and irreverent, and sought to create ‘alternative structures rather than challenge the powers-that-be’. An example were the colourful *indiani metropolitani* (metropolitan Indians). The other component – *Autonomia* – aimed to free the working class from its role as goods, but without renouncing the pay. Hence, the use of tactics that included sabotage and absenteeism, but also armed struggle. *Autonomi* built ‘on the culture of violence of the previous years’ and employed radical militarism ‘to build, and to organize the “new social subjects” for the battle against the state’.²⁶¹ Unlike the British squatted communities, this first wave of Italian self-defined social centres were characterised by the high level of political consciousness of its organisers, who were mainly students and young workers. Furthermore, social centres – just like the libertarian neighbourhood committees – explicitly aimed to increase the political consciousness of the local community, and to work as organisational bases for the wider Movement. All this was less relevant in experiences like Frestonia, where the need of a roof and self-realisation were often the principal drives. Nevertheless, the presence of a politically conscious minority and the libertarian communal lifestyle created the ideal conditions for the politicisation of squatters.

2.4 Punk revival of social centres in the 1980s: Autonomy Clubs and CSOAs

In response to the challenges posed by the Movement of 1977, in the late 1970s, Italian authorities shut many social centres in the attempt of isolating violent radicals and alleged terrorists. This was part of the so-called *teorema Calogero* – the idea that the *Autonomia* was orchestrating an armed coup, which Prosecutor-General Pietro Calogero aimed to stop by ‘draining the sea where the fish [the terrorists] swam’.²⁶² The social centres that had survived repression were then hit by *Riflusso* (the Ebb) – the period of political disengagement following the dissolution of the Movement of 1977. The Ebb stripped the centres of their political meaning turning them into places for partying and heroin consumption.²⁶³ Against this background, Punks ushered in a second generation for libertarian social centres. Repression and *Riflusso* had pushed the generation of late 1970s teenagers away from political ideologies, anarchism included. Cristina Xina – co-founder of the first Italian punk social centre – remembered how impenetrable the ‘Left

²⁶¹ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 379–83; Sergio Bianchi and Lanfranco Caminiti, eds., *Gli Autonomi. Volume 1* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2007), 51, 52.

²⁶² Wu Ming 1, ‘Speciale “7 Aprile”: Il Venticinquennale’, *Carmilla on Line* (blog), accessed 1 October 2015, <http://www.carmillaonline.com/2004/04/08/speciale-7-aprile-il-venticinquennale/>.

²⁶³ ‘Dossier Centri Sociali’, 9.

of the comrades' seemed for sixteen-year-olds, since 'it was very difficult to understand their language'.²⁶⁴ A different type of Ebb hit Britain too in the late 1970s. Besides the squatters' amnesty that had shrunk the environment in which Left-wing activists moved, Thatcherism alienated a generation of angry and non-conformist youths.²⁶⁵ Punk music and its mottoes ('do it yourself', 'no future', 'against all authority') seemed to address perfectly the rage and rebellion of that generation that had lost all hope in the possibility of transforming mainstream society. Even though the punk movement started in the UK around 1975, it was only in 1977-79 that the first self-declared punks appeared in the streets of big Italian cities like Milan, where becoming a punk symbolised a reaction to social homogenisation, invasive police control, suburban council estate ghettos, heroin and criminality.²⁶⁶

Punks filled the void left by the Ebb by opening spaces for concerts and squatted houses.²⁶⁷ Punks looked for cheap – possibly free – places to rehearse and play their music, but they often found coexistence with others problematic. For this reason, at the end of 1981 a group of Milanese punks decided to occupy a warehouse behind an anarchist squatted house inside the premises of the former factory of via Correggio.²⁶⁸ There they founded their own social centre, called Virus, that was deeply influenced by a 'spontaneous libertarian spirit'. For instance, decisions were made by an open collective that sometimes had more than 100 people, and they organised a series of initiatives and musical events against high security prisons, militarism, nuclear energy and vivisection. They regenerated the phenomenon of social centres by using music as their principal means of expression. Although punk lyrics often treated themes of political nature – like antimilitarism and antifascism – they substituted the classical political analysis of 1970s extra-parliamentarian groups with a language full of rage and vulgar expressions. This helped attract young people back to political activism.²⁶⁹

Another fundamental contribution of punks to the revival of social centres was the concept of self-production and Do-It-Yourself material that facilitated the circulation of ideas within the movement. Famous examples of DIY punk material are cassettes and fanzines, or zines, which were photocopied papers with unpolished layout and design.²⁷⁰ Social centres became a place in which it was possible to create grassroots self-produced culture, propose unconventional lifestyles (and live) the revolution together on a daily basis.²⁷¹ This second generation of social centres started a new wave of occupations all over Italy in the mid-1980s that brought the number of CSOAs to 55, mainly in the centre-north regions of Lombardy, Lazio and Tuscany. In 1985

²⁶⁴ Marco Philopat, ed., *Lumi Di Punk* (Milano: Agenzia X, 2006), 110.

²⁶⁵ Thatcherism describes the beliefs of the British government under Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990 – especially a belief in free markets and a 'small State'. 'What Is Thatcherism?', *BBC News*, 10 April 2013, sec. UK Politics, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22079683>.

²⁶⁶ Consorzio Aaster et al., *Centri Sociali: Geografie Del Desiderio*, 109.

²⁶⁷ 'Dossier Centri Sociali', 10.

²⁶⁸ Simone Mosca, 'Philopat E Il Punk Di via Correggio - La Repubblica.it', *Repubblica.it*, 8 September 2012, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2012/08/09/philopat-il-punk-di-via-correggio.html>.

²⁶⁹ 'Dossier Centri Sociali', 10, 11.

²⁷⁰ 'Dossier Centri Sociali'.

²⁷¹ Philopat, *Lumi Di Punk*, 111.

they also created a newsletter to connect the centres, exchange experiences and spread self-management.²⁷²

Their ideological and geographical proximity favoured a growing cooperation between punks and anarchists. This led to a progressive politicisation of several punks, who started calling themselves ‘punx’ to be distinguished from the rest of the movement.²⁷³ Essential was also the work of famous anarcho-punk bands who used music as a means to spread anarchist principles. In Britain, some of those bands – like Crass and The Apostles – even funded Autonomy Clubs, which were the British counterpart of Italian CSOAs. Geographers Stuart Hodgkinson and Paul Chatterton defined Autonomy Clubs as the symbols and centres of 1980s punk counterculture. They were often set up and run by anarchist or communist collectives in rented or squatted or collectively owned places. Among the first Autonomy Clubs were the Autonomy Centre in Wapping (1982-83), Centro Iberico in West London (1982), the 1 in 12 Club in Bradford. The 1 in 12 was founded in 1981, evolving from the local Claimants Union, and still exists today as ‘a group of people who work together to promote certain political ideals and social change; [and] a members social club’.²⁷⁴ Their political action focused on Claimants’ Unions, the unemployed, anti-fascism, and animal liberation, and – from a social viewpoint – they hosted live music, book fairs, fanzine conventions, discussion groups, films, debates and political workshops.²⁷⁵

Even though they cooperated and shared many ideas, the relation between militants from the ‘traditional’ anarchist movement and punks was often tense. In 1981 *A-Rivista* started investigating the ‘ambiguous and contradictory’ universe of punks, whose symbols spanned both enclosed As and swastikas. It published articles, letters and interviews that explored the presence of several self-declared punks – or even ‘post-punks’ – within the Italian anarchist movement. From some of my interviews it emerged that sometimes punx had interpersonal problems with militant anarchists, and lamented a zoo-style situation whenever in their presence: ‘we felt like weird animals’.²⁷⁶ It should be no surprise, then, that despite sharing several anarchist themes and methods, punks kept their autonomy from organised anarchism.

We can see how these different threads came together in Milan. Here the punks had kept a good relationship with the nearby social and political spaces of Conchetta and Torricelli since the 1980 punk concert organised at Conchetta, where the libertarian workers still had their meeting space. Thus, in the early 1980s a new network developed between Correggio, Torricelli and Conchetta, linking punk culture, anarchism and grassroots syndicalism. In 1984, though, the Virus was evicted from Correggio, and its punks began a new roaming season across the city. They found hospitality at the Libreria Calusca – a radical bookshop – whose founder, Primo

²⁷² ‘Dossier Centri Sociali’, 10,11.

²⁷³ Consorzio Aaster et al., *Centri Sociali: Geografie Del Desiderio*, 112,113.

²⁷⁴ ‘The 1 in 12 Club Constitution’, The 1 in 12 Club, accessed 25 May 2016, <http://www.1in12.com/our-constitution.html>.

²⁷⁵ Stuart Hodgkinson and Paul Chatterton, ‘Autonomy in the City? Reflections on the Social Centres Movement in the UK’, *City* 10, no. 3 (December 2006): 305–14.

²⁷⁶ Maria Luisa Romiti, ‘Punk’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, April 1981, http://www.arivista.org/?nr=091&pag=91_10.htm.

Moroni, had always been interested in countercultures and extra-parliamentary movements. In the meantime, the old social centre had fallen in a state of semi-inactivity after the squatting families above had accepted the flats offered by the Council. A situation that presents similarities with the decrease in social spaces in London after the 1977 GLC amnesty. Then, in June 1988, a group of punks, anarcho-syndicalists and people from the Calusca occupied a former restaurant next to the old social space of via Conchetta 18, hence expanding the pre-existing occupied area. They re-founded the social centre and called it CSOA Cox 18.²⁷⁷

By sharing the same anarchistic principles, and often the same meeting space as well, anarcho-punks and anarchist militants frequently co-organised events and direct actions. Moreover, politically-charged punk music and fanzines found in social centres and autonomy clubs the ideal space for reaching masses of young people. For example, Pino spoke of the participation of punks in the early-1980s mass protests against nuclear missiles at the newly-opened NATO base of Comiso, in Sicily. Furthermore, he mentioned the concerts at Conchetta to raise awareness on heroin and AIDS, as ‘in those years, heroin claimed victims flat out, and caused several AIDS-related cases among the comrades too – many people died due to heroin or AIDS’.²⁷⁸ Former punk squatter Bibi said that in Britain too squats and social centres facilitated the politicisation of punks. She claimed that ‘it was almost uncool to take [politics] seriously or think about it, but at the same time everyone was very political. We all used to go to protests about everything, from gay rights and animal rights to the anti-Poll Tax’.²⁷⁹

2.5 Anti-road, Squat Cafés and third-generation CSOAs in the 1990s

The 1990 anti-Poll Tax protests ushered in a new surge of social movements activism that characterised 1990s Britain. Particularly active was the front against the road and airport expansion programme and the Criminal Justice Act of 1994. This Act gave the police new stop-and-search powers and introduced ‘criminal sanctions against travellers, ravers, festival-goers, public assemblies and political protests’, thus affecting mostly young squatters, punks and Left-wing militants.²⁸⁰ What emerged was a new generation of activists that drew inspiration from Hakim Bey’s concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones, and the politics of the Earth First! (EF!) – a non-hierarchical organisation that uses ‘direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces that are responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants’.²⁸¹ These young

²⁷⁷ Cox 18, Archivio Primo Moroni, and Calusca City Lights, *Storia Di Un'autogestione*, 26; Cox 18, ‘Cox18: La Storia’, Cox18Stream, n.d., <http://cox18stream.noblogs.org/la-storia/>.

²⁷⁸ Pino, Interview on Milan social centres.

²⁷⁹ Bibi, Interview on squatting in London, 4 November 2014. The Poll Tax was a flat-rate tax on every adult, without reference to their income or resources. It was introduced in Britain between 1989 and 1990 by the Thatcher conservative government, and replaced by the Council Tax in 1993 after mass opposition and even riots.

²⁸⁰ George McKay, ed., *DiY Culture. Party & Protest in Nineties Britain* (London, New York: Verso, 1998), 61.

²⁸¹ Earth First!, ‘Earth First! 20 Years of Ecological Protest & Resistance’, 2012, <https://www.earthfirst.org.uk/ef20years.pdf>. Earth First! originated in the United States in 1979, but appeared in Britain only in 1991. After its direct involvement in the anti-road movement, it has extended its militant anarchistic actions to oppose the introduction of genetically modified food, coal mines, and to support anti-globalisation, ‘anti-nuke, women’s, hunt sabbing & animal liberation movements’. Being no centralised group, but ‘a convenient banner for

activists blended radical environmentalism with anarchist direct action and the ‘party and protest’ attitude of rave culture.

The embodiment of this were the 1990s occupations of rural and urban areas threatened by road expansion. The first case was the struggle over the building of the M3 extension in Twyford Down, Hampshire (1991-92). This was followed by the ‘No M11-Link’ campaign (1993-95), which revolved around the Claremont Road area, in East London. While the former focused on the issue of non-necessary roads spoiling rural landscapes, the urban location of the latter raised ‘issues of housing, pollution and use of “community” space’.²⁸² The editors of the *Not for rent* book, who clearly shared the view of the protesters, presented the M11 as ‘the road that will save 6 minutes on the car journey from East London to the ring road, and for which hundreds of houses and trees have been sacrificed’.²⁸³ EF!ers actively participated in the protest camp at Twyford Down, and then continued blending the defence of urban communities into their politics (No M11 campaign). By 1997, their sabotage and non-violent direct action tactics forced the government to axe its road-building programme, and but not before it had ‘spawned a generation of radical ecological activists’.²⁸⁴

Among the people involved in the No M11 campaign was Carolyn – a Scottish feminist who arrived in London at seventeen to ‘get away from posh countryside’, and there became an anarchist. She recounted her experience as part of the Claremont Road squatting community. When she moved to that area, she noticed that ‘some of those squatters were part of the campaign and really cared about it, and some of them were just people who ended up squatting there because there were whole streets of empty houses’. Unlike the case of Conchetta, this heterogeneity caused no particular tensions. Carolyn in fact added that ‘some of those [non-politicised squatters] *became* involved in the campaign!’. The ‘under-siege’ atmosphere and the coexistence of long-term campaigners with anarchist activists, squatters, and local residents generated a vibrant environment that facilitated the politicisation of many among both squatters and local residents. Several communities formed along the miles interested by the road extension plans, and some of them – like Leytonstonia or Wanstonia – even declared independence to attract the attention of the media.²⁸⁵

Besides drawing new people to the anti-capitalist movement, the No M11 campaign produced further activism. In fact, the wider radical movement was fluid, with a cross-over of people coming from different countercultural scenes (New Traveller, Free Party, anarchism, environmentalism), moving between camps and protests, and inspiring each other and sharing practices. Despite the eviction of all squatted houses, Carolyn noted that many of the people that had met during the campaign kept working together. They applied the expertise gained in the anti-

people who share similar philosophies to work under’, Earth First! uses its website and a periodical bulletin to keep its activists informed, and biannual meetings to share skills and plan new actions.

²⁸² McKay, *DiY Culture. Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*, 102.

²⁸³ Stacy Wakefield and Grrrt, eds., *Not for Rent* (Amsterdam, Seattle: Evil Twin, 1995), 14.

²⁸⁴ Earth First!, ‘Earth First! 20 Years of Ecological Protest & Resistance’.

²⁸⁵ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part one), 3 March 2016.

road movement to revitalise the small ‘Reclaim the streets action network’, which they later renamed simply Reclaim The Streets (RTS) network. The idea was to reclaim urban spaces for the people rather than for the cars and other symbols of capitalism. RTS followed the principle of non-violent direct action, such as the organisation of street parties – an idea that Carolyn described as coming ‘from Claremont Road in the first place’. RTS immediately turned into a national phenomenon that at its peak saw 6,000 people occupying the M41 outside London in July 1996.²⁸⁶

Earth First! gatherings, and radical publications like *Do or Die* (1993-2003) and *SchNEWS* (1994-2014), were essential to stay up-to-date and to coordinate direct actions. The former was an occasional magazine ‘crammed with reports and analysis from the world-wide ecological frontlines’. Writing for *Do or Die* were people who participated in environmental struggles, and who ‘took action to defend nature, create revolution and re-wild humanity’. As it started as the magazine of Earth First!, it principally shed light on the issues followed by EF!, but also informed on international themes and offered theoretical reflections.²⁸⁷ While *Do or Die* published only ten issues, the Brighton-based and anarchist *SchNEWS* collective edited a website, a weekly news-sheet, books, and even produced short films. Again, they united environmental and social struggles, from the anti-road protests to the fights against the privatisation of public services. Besides their reports, they were especially proud of their ‘Party and protest’ section (‘updated every week with a mishmash of festival dates, meetings and demos’) and their do-it-yourself guide, with ‘useful tips on everything from setting up your own newsletter to making your own bio-diesel’. *SchNEWS* was a highly influential publication that reached thousands of people every week in rural and urban contexts, both in its printed form and as a PDF-attachment. In 2006 they claimed they were receiving over 500 emails every week, and ‘guestimate[d reaching] around 50,000 people a week’.²⁸⁸

Each of the squatted areas at the centre of the anti-road movement, like Claremont Road, had a place ‘offering cheap organic vegan food, DIY cultural events and a living example of anarchist politics’ – a Squat Café. Throughout the 1990s, Squat Cafés became a common presence in British cities, and represented the latest evolution of British ‘pre-social centres’. Sometimes, British activists took inspiration from the experience of European militant squatters, and turned Squat Cafés into prototypes of social centres with residential squatters.²⁸⁹ An example was Kebele Kulture Project in Bristol, founded in 1995. It started as a squat for four people, who were part of a bigger anarchist scene in Easton – a working-class and multicultural area of Bristol with a radical reputation. According to Tim, who was formerly involved in the management of Kebele, they had initially moved in because they needed a place to live, but had then realised they could use the space on the ground floor as ‘a hub, a base, or a centre for the wider alternative community to

²⁸⁶ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two), 10 March 2016.

²⁸⁷ Electronic copies of the issues of *Do or Die* are available here: ‘Do or Die’, *Do or Die*, accessed 28 May 2016, <http://www.doordie.org.uk/>.

²⁸⁸ *SchNEWS*, ‘About Us’, *SchNEWS*, accessed 29 May 2016, http://www.schnews.org.uk/about_us/.

²⁸⁹ Hodkinson and Chatterton, ‘Autonomy in the City? Reflections on the Social Centres Movement in the UK’, 306, 307.

socialise, organise activities, discuss, debate, argue, get pissed, watch films'. This idea formed gradually as the activist-squatters came in contact with what Tim called 'European activists' – young people that had been involved in social centres in countries where the social centre movement was already developed, such as Italy and Spain. One of Kebele founders was from Spain, but a further influence came by participating in international meetings as the whole alter-globalisation and anti-capitalist movement gained strength in the late 1990s.

Kebele developed thus into a place that aimed to 'provide a living example of anarchist politics in action ... an example of: "Here we are, we do this for nothing, we do it together – this is what we can do" ... A space to provide information, to try and stimulate a debate around anarchism and similar ideas. Yeah, just to act as a hub for alternative stuff in Bristol'.²⁹⁰ Thanks to fundraising parties and donations – also by the anarcho-punk band Chumbawamba – the Kebele Housing Cooperative managed to purchase the building in 1998, thus ensuring its survival. Without the threat of eviction, Kebele's premises became the base for many activities and local groups, such as a vegan café, a bike workshop, a sound system and party network, an allotment, different forms of art, a service of radical information and publications, and numerous events and meetings with speakers and artists.²⁹¹ Founded as a squat and a 'Kulture Project', it had gradually become a full-fledged 'social centre' as Kebele actively supported the creation of a British-Irish 'social centres network' in the mid-2000s, whose aim was to 'promote debate and action on the need for autonomous spaces in our cities and neighbourhoods'.²⁹²

As Tim confirmed, Italy was a major reference point for the British libertarians involved in social experiments because of its long experience. The social centres that had inspired spaces like Kebele in the mid and late 1990s were in fact the third generation of Italian centres. These were the radical answer to the mainstream politics of those years. The early 1990s brought a radical political change with the *Tangentopoli* (Bribesville) scandal, which unearthed a deep-rooted situation of political corruption, and was followed by a nationwide judicial investigation that led to a series of incarcerations and suicides of politicians and businessmen. Ultimately, the historical Italian parties disappeared and the political system collapsed, thus preparing the way for the growth of the autonomist and racist *Lega Nord* (Northern League) and the famous *discesa in campo* (entering the field) of media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. Moreover, the influential PCI self-destructed in an attempt to reinvent itself as a social democratic party as a consequence of the crumbling of the Eastern European communist regimes.²⁹³ For these reasons, young activists struggled to find their political referents within mainstream politics.

When in 1989-90 the Pantera student movement against the Ruberti university reform inspired a wave of nationwide demonstrations and universities' occupations, a mass of re-

²⁹⁰ Tim, Interview on Kebele.

²⁹¹ Kebele collective, 'Our Story', Kebele Community Co-op, accessed 26 May 2016, <https://network23.org/kebele2/ourstory/>.

²⁹² 'What's This Place?', Social Centres Stories, 2008, <https://socialcentrestories.wordpress.com/>.

²⁹³ Donald Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy. Economy Society and Politics since 1945*, Second (London, New York: Longman, 1997), 186.

politicised youths recovered and revived the concept of social centres. This third generation of social centres revolved around new political issues, like immigration and anti-prohibition, and rap became the new prevailing music genre. Between 1985 and 2003, over 200 new social centres were founded in eighteen out of twenty regions, especially in university cities. However, only 17% of these were in southern Italy. Three main reasons contributed to this: A generally higher level of social conservativeness in the South; the tendency of young people – the age group more actively involved in social centres – to migrate towards more prestigious universities in the North; and the historical presence of organised crime, which contrasts experiments that draw the attention of the authorities and that provide alternatives to the *status quo*.²⁹⁴

What distinguished this new phase was a change in the character of CSOAs, both in terms of how they related to authorities, and how people engaged with them. After the Pantera-induced temporary expansion, repression and evictions returned in full force as the media and politicians urged their closure and even likened them to a ‘terrorists’ hideout. To preserve their space, several social centres – up to 50% in 1998 – entered into agreements with municipality or landlords. However, this often created fractures between activists as some prioritised keeping the social centre and its activities open while others preferred to re-squat elsewhere. Often anarchists see negotiating with the authorities as a betrayal of the prefigurative principle that the means to an end should not contradict the end itself – namely, abolishing such authorities. If the social centre found an agreement, such as moving to a new building or accepting some rules, they adopted the acronym CSA rather than CSOA, as they were not ‘occupied/squatted’ anymore.²⁹⁵ The other fundamental novelty, in this new phase of social centres, regarded the changes in the managing collectives and those using CSOAs. Many people involved in the management of 1990s social centres had experienced the socio-political exclusion that affected those who attempted some form of activism in the 1980s post-*Riflusso* desert. The profile of the regular visitors too had changed – students and white-collar workers were gradually replacing punks and other subcultures. They saw social centres as ‘places of cultured and socialising entertainment’, and were thus a mass of ‘rule-breakers by night and integrated into mainstream society by day’.²⁹⁶ Such a distance between collectives and frequenters produced a new type of relationship between them. Instead of the traditional fluidity between the two ‘roles’, a clear separation emerged and still exists today in most social centres.

Arcangelo was a university student in Bari when the Pantera movement attracted him, and he started to frequent a student collective. It was during one of the collective’s assemblies that they started discussing the absence of social centres in Bari while CSOAs thrived in Italy. Arcangelo and the other students perceived Bari as ‘the only city without’ a social centre, and

²⁹⁴ Pierpaolo Mudu, ‘Resisting and Challenging Neoliberalism: The Development of Italian Social Centers’, in *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, by Squatting Europe Kollektive (Wivenhoe / New York / Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 71–72, 74–75.

²⁹⁵ Mudu, 70; Cox 18, Archivio Primo Moroni, and Calusca City Lights, *Storia Di Un’autogestione*, xxiii.

²⁹⁶ Consorzio Aaster et al., *Centri Sociali: Geografie Del Desiderio*, 137–49; Cox 18, Archivio Primo Moroni, and Calusca City Lights, *Storia Di Un’autogestione*, 58, 59.

were ashamed by this. They thus started discussing the occupation of a place ‘to involve completely different areas: anarcho-libertarians, anarcho-punks, *autonomi* ... [and create] a model of the alternative society we wanted’.²⁹⁷ Gennaro, a casual worker who called himself ‘neither anarchist nor communist’ but ‘a libertarian’, added that their objective was to ‘create a common house for all movements ... base unions, unemployed movement, ... communists, anarchists’.²⁹⁸ Arcangelo – who had become an anarcho-communist punk – called this ‘class recomposition’: ‘a recomposition of radically ... different individuals and traditions’, and social classes.²⁹⁹

The Barese activists were immediately evicted after a first brief occupation that had attracted ‘more than one thousand enthusiasts’ – a mass-participation that confirmed the Barese need for social spaces while the city had an abundance of derelict and abandoned places. To draw the attention of the city to this issue, they organised a series of flash-occupations of symbolic places such as the famous Fibronit – a dismissed but still unsafe asbestos factory. Actions that, like the contemporary British anti-road movement, connected environmental, social and anti-capitalist themes. Finally, they squatted an abandoned coach depot near the city centre in 1994: CSOA Fucine Meridionali. There, they hosted debates ‘of theoretical-political nature, punk concerts..., alternative theatre experiences, film clubs’ and other initiatives that attracted ‘a multitude of people’.³⁰⁰ However, Gennaro admitted that ‘the relationship ... with the surrounding houses was awful ... We almost had fights because they threw bottles full of frozen water at us! ... Many saw us as aliens, weirdos with green hair and dogs’.³⁰¹ Arcangelo explained that ‘it was a problem to have gigs every weekend – this constant and huge bustle of people’. In contrast, both Arcangelo and Gennaro remembered that the CSOA had a good relationship with the rest of the city, as up to 1500 people attended their concerts, and 8000 the general strike they had co-sponsored in Bari in 1994.³⁰² Also, on the eviction day, ‘[w]ithin a few hours, the street became flooded with this demonstration of secondary and university students, and [other] people, who thus made the eviction impossible’.³⁰³

Fucine ‘had good relations’ with many social centres, as it was a lively and proactive CSOA. It promoted the creation of a national coordinating organisation of social centres. Arcangelo described taking part in ‘these coordination meetings with collectives from Milan or Turin’, but he noticed that while each CSOA had a specific political identity, Fucine’s composite identity allowed it to dialogue with all social centres.³⁰⁴ Being the only Barese social centre, Fucine attracted radicals from the whole province of Bari. In fact, Gennaro claimed they had

²⁹⁷ Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali, 2 February 2015. *Autonomi were the workerist, and often violent, part of the Movement of 1977*. For more information, see: Bianchi and Caminiti, *Gli Autonomi. Volume 1*.

²⁹⁸ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata, 31 January 2015.

²⁹⁹ Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

³⁰⁰ Arcangelo.

³⁰¹ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³⁰² Gennaro.

³⁰³ Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

³⁰⁴ Arcangelo.

become a regional catalyst for local experiences and coordinating networks. Furthermore, together with Leoncavallo, Fucine members ‘created ... the union for unemployed and atypical workers ... [to oppose] precarisation of work, deregulation, [strike] restrictions’.³⁰⁵ Despite the branch’s closure following tensions with the national board of the Cobas base union, this experience demonstrates that Fucine was more than a social space. It strove to spread libertarian principles within the labour movement and in town.

Besides young activists and students, both Arcangelo and Gennaro underlined the presence of what they called ‘lumpenproletariat’ – ‘individuals on the border between legality and illegality, with a difficult background, even with prison experience ... who [nonetheless] participated in the life of the social centre’, and sometimes slept there too. In 1995, during an attempted eviction, however, they accepted relocation in the San Marcello district. As the new space had been offered by the local authorities rather than occupied/squatted, Fucine became a CSA (Centro Sociale Autogestito, as opposed to Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito). Soon, though, the collective imploded for internal frictions and for the infiltration of the local underworld, and was finally evicted after a few months.³⁰⁶ Fucine did not survive the tension between the theory of a libertarian ‘common house’ and the practice of real life, in which factionalism and individualism are hard to eradicate. Nevertheless, its experience led former visitors to found a new social centre in the nearby village of Adelfia in 1997.³⁰⁷ In the 1990s, libertarian spaces remained a reference point for urban subcultures and their music, but – especially in Italy – they also welcomed a re-politicisation of the space. Anarchists, libertarian radicals, *autonomi*, squatters and punx met to socialise and enjoy cultural events, as well as to organise anti-capitalist, radical environmentalist actions. In addition, social centres generally rediscovered a socio-political function within their neighbourhood.

2.6 2000s and 2010s: anti-global movement and social centres

The anti-roads movement peaked in 1996-97 with the Newbury bypass protests, the eviction of the Fairmile camp and the Manchester airport protest.³⁰⁸ After that, the decline of the anti-roads movement and of the broader cross-over between sub/countercultures began. This was primarily caused by the election of the Labour government, which stopped the Conservative’s road programme, but also by a shift in the activists’ focus towards globalisation – from the foundation of the anti-globalisation coordination Peoples’ Global Action to the organisation of anti-G8 summit protests.³⁰⁹ Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, the challenge of the anti-capitalist movement to the global institutions, such as the G8 and the World Trade Organisation, led to

³⁰⁵ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³⁰⁶ Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali; Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³⁰⁷ Alessandra Anaclerio, ‘Dalle Fucine a Villa Roth, Storia E Fallimento Dei Centri Sociali a Bari’, Barinedita, 21 January 2014, <http://www.barinedita.it/inchieste/n1138-dalle-fucine-a-villa-roth-storia-e-fallimento-dei-centri-sociali-a-bari>.

³⁰⁸ ‘Early UK Road Protest Movement - A History’, The Green Fuse, accessed 11 September 2017, <http://www.thegreenfuse.org/protest/>.

³⁰⁹ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

mass demonstrations in both Britain and Italy. Noteworthy was the Reclaim The Streets-inspired 10,000-people street party that paralysed the City of London during the global day of action against capital on 18 June 1999. Following a reflection on the lack of coordination between radical movements, this new mass of anti-capitalist activists rediscovered the need of autonomous meeting places to gather and organise. In this way, legal and squatted social centres spread across the country. The former were mostly resource centres, while the latter were set up principally by anarcho-communists on the model of Italian CSOAs.³¹⁰ Beginning in 2002, the anarchist collective WOMBLES (2001-06) ushered in a new type of social centre ‘based on experiences from around Europe and especially Italy’ – occupied places turned into political and social hubs, and based on self-organisation, anti-hierarchy, direct action, and anti-capitalism. Their aim was to overcome the self-segregation that had characterised countercultural places like Squat Cafés, Autonomy Clubs and resource centres, and to attract ‘ordinary people’ through film screenings, courses, workshops, and other activities. They saw social centres as ‘a first “port of call”’ – a space where ‘ordinary people who want to fully participate in reshaping and re-imagining their environment [can have their first] interaction with anarchists’.³¹¹

One of the main figures behind the social centres movement of 2000s is Alessio Lunghi, a British libertarian communist of Italian origin. After being part of Reclaim The Streets, he participated – with other British activists – in the mobilisation against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Prague in 2000, where they met Italian activists. During the following visit to Italy, they experienced the world of Italian social centres, like the anarchist social centre Libera in Modena, and started the Wombles collective in London. The name Wombles was a direct reference to a 1970s TV show for children, whose theme song reflected their social and political ethos.³¹² They were mainly young, working-class people. Although anarchist in practice, they ‘didn’t define [them]selves as anarchists ... just wanted to be effective’. Alessio and the other Wombles opened a series of occupied social centres, each usually lasting for a few months before being evicted. The most successful, in his opinion, was the Ex-Grand Banks in Kentish Town in 2004, where they managed to involve a numerous population of school students in the management of the space. Alessio proudly stated that some of these students are still active socially and politically, and – without that social centre – could have entered one of the gangs in the area. Additionally, ‘what usually happens is that other squatters move in the area and occupy other places. So, at a point we had four spaces [in Kentish Town]’ managed by different collectives. The case of Ex-Grand Banks shows the potential of social centres as a catalyst for both politically conscientious and ‘ordinary’ people.³¹³

³¹⁰ Hodkinson and Chatterton, ‘Autonomy in the City? Reflections on the Social Centres Movement in the UK’, 307.

³¹¹ Alessio L., ‘The Spring of Social Centres’, in *What’s This Place?* (Leeds: Footprints Workers Co-operative, 2007), 33, 34.

³¹² ‘Making good use of the things that we find / Things that the everyday folks leave behind’.

³¹³ Alessio Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London, 27 February 2016.

As it had already happened with Kebele in the late 1990s, Italian individuals and social centres were once again inspirational to British libertarians. In the early-2000s, social centres were at the very heart of the growing anti-capitalist and alter-global movement in Italy, where radicals focused their attention on issues such as the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa and the so-called ‘wars on terror’ in Afghanistan and Iraq.³¹⁴ At a national level, Italian politics was dominated by Berlusconi’s Right-wing governments in the 2000s (2001-06 and 2008-11). In this period, protests were often organised against the conservative and neoliberal policies of his governments. This confirmed Della Porta’s claim that Italian social movements generally engage more in protests when Right-wing parties are in power.³¹⁵ The Barese social-centre scene experienced however a slack period in those years, as its last social centre had been Fucine Meridionali. According to Tony – a young activist – this happened because the main Left-wing student association of Bari (UdS/UdU) was union-funded. All the city’s potential radicals with an interest in active politics were thus co-opted by UdS/UdU and ‘trapped in ... a sort of internship towards a political career’ rather than in direct-action politics.³¹⁶ It was only with the Onda (Wave) national student movement of 2008-09 that the Barese students rediscovered direct actions and self-management.³¹⁷ They occupied the university and self-organised classes as a form of protest against the government cuts to education.

As it had already happened with the 1990 Pantera student movement, the debates in the assemblies of the occupied university led to discussions about the necessity to open a new social centre in Bari. A collective formed and discussions continued, and then – in 2010 – a group of activists founded CSOA Ex-Mercato Occupato (Occupied Former Market). Carmen, then a languages student, was part of the short-lived Ex-Mercato, which she defined a ‘super scruffy occupation’ due to the lack of organisation. After this first experiment, the members of the collective stayed in touch through the San Precario national network against casual work, and then occupied an abandoned secondary school in San Pasquale – CSOA Villa Roth.³¹⁸ Their objective, in Tony’s words, was: ‘To open a place and return it horizontally to the neighbourhood and the city through initiatives of the people themselves, who would see this place as a container

³¹⁴ ‘Series of Articles on the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, October 2001, <http://www.arivista.org/index.php?nr=275&pag=index.htm>; Maria Matteo, ‘Non in Mio Nome’, December 2001, <http://www.arivista.org/?nr=277&pag=5.htm>; Andrea Papi, ‘Oltre La Guerra-Spettacolo’, May 2003, <http://www.arivista.org/?nr=290&pag=5.htm>.

³¹⁵ Donatella Della Porta, ‘Il Movimento per Una Giustizia Globale: Una Prospettiva Transnazionale E Cross-Nazionale’, n.d., http://www.sociologia.unimib.it/DATA/Insegnamenti/3_2242/materiale/della%20porta%20i%20movimenti%20per%20la%20giustizia%20globale.pdf.

³¹⁶ Vito et al., Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata, 30 January 2015.

³¹⁷ ‘La Sapienza Sfida Berlusconi ‘Niente Polizia All’ Università’ - La Repubblica.it’, *Archivio - La Repubblica.it*, accessed 15 June 2015, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/10/23/la-sapienza-sfida-berlusconi-niente-polizia-all.html>; ‘Migliaia in Corteo Contro La Nuova Riforma’, *La Repubblica.it - Palermo*, 20 October 2008, <http://palermo.repubblica.it/dettaglio/migliaia-in-corteo-contro-la-nuova-riforma/1529761>; ‘Il Racconto Dell’aggressione Fascista a Roma’, *Micromega-Online*, accessed 15 June 2015, <http://temi.repubblica.it/micromega-online/il-racconto-dellaggressione-fascista-a-roma/>.

³¹⁸ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres, 1 February 2015.

of their own needs – from culture to art to housing’.³¹⁹ Villa Roth hosted social initiatives for the local residents, like a social vegetable garden and football matches for children, as well as cultural events like acoustic concerts and experimental theatre shows.³²⁰

Despite the strong participation of the people of the neighbourhood, after the eviction in 2014, Carmen lamented that they received active solidarity only from the people who used to attend their cultural events (‘who already have a political awareness’). She thus realised local residents saw the social centre as ‘a service’.³²¹ Carmen and her comrades found themselves in a situation similar to what the San Pasquale anarcho-communists experienced in the late 1970s. These episodes shed light on the tension between the political aspirations of the activists and the reality they find themselves living in. The ex-occupiers of Villa Roth developed nonetheless a solidarity network with other libertarian realities. They cooperated with an anarcho-punk collective from Andria, north of Bari, and some libertarians from the ex-Socrate Occupato (2010-13), which had been squatted by Trotskyists and anarchists to house homeless immigrants.³²² They exploited the divisions between mayor and Province governor regarding Villa Roth eviction, and occupied the former Rossani barracks (80,000 square metres opposite the central train station).³²³ The CSOA Ex-Caserma Liberata (Liberated Ex-Barracks), often just called Rossani, is still active.³²⁴

In the 2000s-2010s, urban libertarian spaces of Britain and Italy rediscovered or expanded their socio-political mission within the city as a first ‘port of call’ for radical activism. Besides being a reference point for social movements and activists, they host(ed) social and cultural activities that have the double objective of providing a service that is missing, while conveying a political message. In these recent years, they have finally overcome, at least in their intentions, the niche-countercultural character that had distinguished squatted areas in the 1970s, and punk clubs and CSOAs in the 1980s. What emerged from this (inevitably partial) reconstruction of post-1968 libertarian spaces is a mutual influence between wider social movements and such experiences. On the one hand, periods of intense activism swell the ranks of social movements, whose increased number and political reflections generally lead to the decision to revive or open a place to meet and to use as a base for social activism. On the other, the activities of these places often had the effect of attracting and politicising new people, thus potentially starting a virtuous

³¹⁹ Tony, Villa Roth, la verità dei ragazzi raccontata da Tony, January 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFvVSdWtCfE>.

³²⁰ ‘Dossier Villa Roth Occupata’, February 2014.

³²¹ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

³²² Socrate Occupato, ‘Cos’è Il Socrate/What’s “socrate”?’, accessed 20 March 2015, <http://socrateoccupatobari.noblogs.org/cose-il-socrate/>; Vito et al., Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³²³ Torto, ‘I Ragazzi Di Villa Roth E Quelli Delle Fucine. Vent’anni Di Sgomberi, Due Ville, Due Muri’, *Bari Underground - Repubblica Bari* (blog), 16 January 2014, <http://bari-underground.blogautore.repubblica.it/2014/01/16/i-ragazzi-di-villa-roth-e-quelli-delle-fucine-ventanni-di-sgomberi-due-ville-due-muri/>; ‘Bari, Le Forze Dell’ordine Sgomberano Villa Roth’, *News* (Antenna Sud, 14 January 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5KJJSFjj3o>.

³²⁴ Nicola Signorile, *Diario Rossani* (Bari: CaratteriMobili, 2014); Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres; Vito et al., Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata; Francesca Russi, ‘I Ragazzi Di Villa Roth Occupano L’ex Rossani’, *Repubblica.it*, 2 February 2014, http://bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/02/02/news/i_ragazzi_di_villa_roth_ora_occupano_l_ex_rossani-77539742/.

circle. This was usually easier with people already interested in cultural or social aspects than with working-class residents. However, every time a libertarian space proved to be successful in its social 'propaganda of the deed', either local authorities enforced evictions or, as Carolyn said: 'The government sent undercover police to spy on the movement and to try and repress it'.³²⁵

3. Post-1968 rural communities in Britain and Italy

Throughout the 1960s, the hippie counterculture and the back-to-the-land movement revitalised and spread rural communes. Many were hippies and students who had 'dropped out' to approach a new communal lifestyle on the road or in rural communes after a process of 'freeing up' in which – after breaking with family and straight friends – they opted for a life with no fix places and institutionalised relationships.³²⁶ After the post-1968 disillusionment, many young radicals that had started living a communal lifestyle in urban settings moved to the countryside. There, they either joined the pre-existing hippie-style communes or founded new rural libertarian communities. An anonymous communitard wrote in 1972: 'Between '69 and '71 many comrades suffered the blow of the ebb and were tired of a movement that ... had exhausted [its] rage and creativity'. Some of the comrades were disappointed by the life in urban communes, which had reproduced relationships 'similar to those of a "big family"', and thus moved to the countryside to establish rural communes.³²⁷ Thousands of young people had abandoned the idea of 'converting' the whole world to their revolutionary model and chose instead to stand outside the mainstream in order to create their own 'model society'. A 'sectarian alternative society' often based on communitarianism, peace, sexual liberation and racial equality.³²⁸

3.1 Rural communities in Britain

Many hippies embraced the appeal from the English underground magazine *Gandalf's garden* (1968-69) that invited its readers to take care of both their outer and inner gardens. Gardens and rural communes became the symptom of environmental consciousness and the symbol of a back-to-nature manifesto that opposed multi-coloured spaces to the gloomy military-industrial complex. Following what George McKay called 'horti-counterculture', during the 1960s and 1970s intentional communities sprang up in rural areas to experiment new ways of living, in harmony with the nature. Rural communities adopted several models: some opted for a sheer 'primitivism', as they saw technological progress as superfluous or even incompatible with the environmental cause, while others preferred 'survivalism' by applying 1975 Patrick Rivers' pioneering ideas on alternative technologies (use of sun, wind, rivers and tides for power).³²⁹

³²⁵ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

³²⁶ Lawrence Wieder, Don Zimmerman, "Becoming a Freak: Pathways into the Counter-Culture," *Youth and Society* 7, no. 3 (1976): 312.

³²⁷ Emina et al., *Vivere Insieme!*, 2nd ed. (Roma: Arcana, 1977), 119.

³²⁸ Kenneth Westhues, "Hippiedom 1970: Some Tentative Hypotheses," *The Sociological Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1972): 81.

³²⁹ George McKay, *Radical Gardening. Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011), 106-153.

In the early 1970s, an embryonic Commune Movement challenged the hippie idea of standing outside the mainstream to create one's own private paradise. They issued a manifesto with a 'distinctly anarchist approach and ethic' that recovered the old anarchist idea of a federation of communes. They presented such federation as 'the only alternative to present dictatorship by democracy ... [that] would eventually render centralised government largely irrelevant'.³³⁰ As intentional communities mushroomed across the country, copies of the publications connected to the Commune Movement were distributed in their thousands. One of these bulletins was the *Directory of Communes*, which provided theoretical reflections on the movement, and helped the interaction between communes and prospective communards. In its third issue of 1970, the *Directory* presented an old anarchist fixation, Israeli kibbutzim, as the model for the Commune Movement wished-for federation of communes. In their opinion, kibbutzim 'are one of the few societies which have achieved both communism and democracy and practically eliminated a class structure'.³³¹ Despite the good intentions, no real federation of communes ever arose.

Nicholas Albery, one of the charismatic leaders of the urban community Frestonia in London, had been secretary for the Commune Movement. Before moving to London, Albery and his partner Josefine Speyer lived in a rural commune.³³² It was common in the 1970s for squatters and activists to move from rural to urban communities, and vice versa, demonstrating the fluidity of the alternative/radical movement during this time. Thus, the horti-counterculture-inspired sensibility towards a more sustainable way of life reached the cities too. In 1972 a small situationist-style collective named 'Street farmers' commenced to plant fruit trees and vegetables in the streets of London, whereas others re-launched the allotment culture to break free from the capitalist cycle of supply and demand.³³³ One of the first members of the Commune Movement was the 1969-founded Shrub Family commune in Norfolk, which actively supported the idea of a federation of communes.³³⁴ Andrew Rigby defined it a self-actualising community, as Shrub Family aimed to create 'a new social order by providing, within the community, that environment in which the individual members feel most free to find themselves, to develop their individual skills and creative potential to the utmost through the exercise of individual freedom'.³³⁵ Rigby, who visited them, noticed that most communards did not believe in demonstrations or other conventional protest tactics, rather 'as individuals, one or two of them had ... joined forces with others in an attempt to disrupt an otter hunt that had taken place in their neighbourhood'. A typical example of direct action. One of the early members claimed they sought to directly influence the

³³⁰ Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 289, 293, 294.

³³¹ *Directory of Communes and Commune Projects, Tribes, Crashpads and Related Phenomena in Great Britain and Europe*. 3. (London: Commune Movement, BIT, 1970), 10.

³³² Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

³³³ George McKay, *Radical Gardening. Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011), 154-195.

³³⁴ 'Shrub Family', Diggers & Dreamers, accessed 20 May 2016, <http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/communities/existing/shrub-family>.

³³⁵ In his books, Rigby calls the commune Shrub Family, and reported 1970 as its foundation year. Rigby, *Alternative Realities. A Study Of Communes And Their Members*, 100.

local community by having ‘them see what we are doing and accept us’, as ‘by living in communes and by living a different way of life we can make some people sit up and think: “maybe there is another way of life, maybe we ought to change our way of life”’. For this reason, they decided to be open to visitors. According to Rigby, the communards had developed a good relationship with the neighbours, as well as with the local police – despite their habit of ‘smoking dope [as] a regular past time’.³³⁶

In the 1980s, a second wave of communal groups renovated the movement of British communes, thanks to a new generation of activists ‘radicalised during the Thatcher years’. In 1988 some of them set up Radical Routes – a new network for radical co-operatives to share skills and to help new groups set up other co-operatives. In ten years, Chris Coates affirmed, ‘it had grown from the original five groups ... to a network of nearly 40 co-ops involving some 200 people’, and it had granted over 25 loans to different housing and workers’ co-operatives – both in rural and urban settings.³³⁷ British rural communities changed drastically between mid-1980s and 1990s, as a growing number of anarchist activists entered the movement after a process of radicalisation. This was the consequence of a variety of factors. Fundamental was the emergence of New Age travellers in that period – people with a New Age and hippie lifestyle. They travelled between free music festivals using second-hand vehicles converted into mobile homes, and there they camped. Equally important were also other contemporary and interconnected movements that contributed to the general renovation of the idea of rural communities. Particularly active were anti-nuclear protest camps outside military base – like the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp (1981-2000) – and the anti-road movement of early 1990s.³³⁸ Conservative governments reacted to all this with increasing repressive measures that culminated with the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. This granted police and local authorities new powers to suppress unauthorised demonstrations and happenings. These movements challenged nevertheless the idea of rural communities as more stable and less politically active than urban communities, and in fact blurred the boundaries between rural and urban.

The same people often moved around to participate in different struggles, or festivals.³³⁹ Hugo, 50-year-old squatter and former traveller, for example, went from attending different marches (Stop the City, anti-vivisection, anti-homophobic) to squatting a house in Claremont Road. There, he had ‘an amazing time building bunkers, digging tunnels, cooking each other’s dinners’. After the eviction, he ‘healed [his] wounds – mental and physical’, and moved to ‘a little bit of waste ground with a library next to it, and then moved on again and again and again. That’s what travellers do, I suppose’, although – he added – ‘it would be nice actually to choose when to move rather than always being kicked out’. He continued going to free festivals and marches,

³³⁶ Rigby, *Communes in Britain*, 40–67.

³³⁷ Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 360–67.

³³⁸ For more information on the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp, see: Sasha Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices. The Queer Feminism of Greenham* (London, New York: Cassell, 2000).

³³⁹ Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 368. 369.

and doing direct actions before moving into a caravan ‘on a muddy spot up on a mountain’ in Wales for eleven years.³⁴⁰ Unlike the hippie communes of 1960s, libertarian rural communities had a political consciousness that developed a holistic approach encompassing both anti-capitalism and environmentalism. Even though the great ideas of federations died away and the movement appeared fragmented, Coates noted: ‘there was arguably more communal activity going on at the very end of the 20th Century than there had been in the preceding decades’.³⁴¹

3.2 Rural communities in Italy

By the early 1970s, hippie communes had appeared in Italy too. The most famous case was the 1970 Ovada commune, in Piedmont, where drop-out students had flocked to live a life based on equality and co-operation, and to experiment new social relations in harmony with nature – with a little help from hallucinogenic drugs.³⁴² When Walter Pagliero, then a journalist for an underground magazine, arrived at Ovada, he immediately noticed a group of ‘beautiful, breezy, fit’ young people – several underage runaways – living without running water or electricity, but ‘there was no shortage of music’. Mainly, they were escaping from traditional family and industrial cities – preferring ‘self-exile’ to active politics, and civil disobedience and non-violence to the tactics of the revolutionary anarchist/communist groups of the time. On the walls of the squatted farms were painted anarchist symbols as well as meditation mantras and hippie slogans. The interest of Italian anarchists in this phenomenon is reflected by the rediscovery of historical examples of libertarian communities. In 1970, Pier Carlo Masini mentioned Colonia Cecilia (1890-94) in his *Storia degli anarchici italiani* (History of the Italian anarchists).³⁴³ The story of Cecilia appeared again on the magazine *A-Rivista* in 1973, and again in 1977 in an article that criticised the 1975 film on Cecilia due to the stereotyped fashion in which anarchists were portrayed.³⁴⁴

Despite this interest, historian Franco Schirone highlighted the existence of a clear-cut division within the Movement, since the ‘official protesters’ belonging to the politicised student movement had nicknamed them ‘anarcho-hippies’. A term they used ironically, distancing themselves from what they considered to be the past that the ’68 had wiped out.³⁴⁵ Looking at the anarchist press of 1970s, we see the same fracture. An example is the 1971 letter of a reader to the most important Italian anarchist newspaper, *Umanità Nova*. After ridiculing the complex and

³⁴⁰ Hugo, Interview on squatting, 2 March 2016.

³⁴¹ Coates, *Communes Britannica*, 375.

³⁴² Olivares, *Comuni, Comunità, Ecovillaggi*, 62.

³⁴³ Masini, *Storia Degli Anarchici Italiani*.

³⁴⁴ Franca B., ‘Cittadella E Cecilia’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, October 1973, http://www.arivista.org/?nr=024&pag=24_09.htm; Jean-Louis Comolli, *La Cecilia*, 1975; Rozac, ‘Al Cinema: La Colonia Cecilia’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, June 1977, http://www.arivista.org/index.php?nr=058&pag=58_12.htm&key=colonia%20cecilia; For later articles on Cecilia, see: Andrea Papi, ‘Cecilia: Un Esperimento Sociale’, *Volontà*, 1989; Zecca Castel, ‘Quelli Della Cecilia’; Isabelle Felici, ‘Una Storia D’amore E Di Anarchia’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, April 2014, <http://www.arivista.org/?nr=388&pag=57.htm>.

³⁴⁵ Ignazio Maria Gallino, ed., *La Comune Hippy Di Ovada* (Milano: Ignazio Maria Gallino Editore, 2012), xix–xxxiv.

aggressive language the newspaper used, he accused them of deliberately ignoring anarchic experiences – such as hippie communes – that are ‘more effective alternatives to bourgeois lifestyle than your fine words’.³⁴⁶ The reply of the newspaper, and other articles on both *Umanità Nova* and *A-Rivista*, recall the harsh hostility of the anarchist movement against Colonia Cecilia and similar experiments of the early twentieth century. The only commune they accepted was intended primarily as a productive unit and only secondarily as a lifestyle unit because ‘so far social transformations ... always followed new modes of production’.³⁴⁷ Such positions delineate a political profile of the 1970s Italian anarchist movement that is similar to that of Malatesta’s time. Anarchist communism and social revolution were the key words in a turbulent period that made radicals think of an imminent revolution.

Dozens of rural communes appeared in the early 1970s. A ‘book of communes’ (*Vivere insieme – il libro delle comuni*), printed in 1974 and again in 1977 as a new edition, thoroughly illustrated what communes were and where they came from.³⁴⁸ In addition, it presented several of the rural communes established during the 1970s – all in central/northern Italy. This could be explained with the different cultural and socio-economic fabric of southern Italy, as the South lacked the industrial metropolis many youths escaped from, and a commune of naked long-haired would have been even more outrageous for the hyper-conservative southern villagers. Probably, it was also harder to find abandoned rural properties in an area where agriculture was still the principal economic sector. As it had happened after 1968, the disillusionment caused by the end of the Movement of 1977 (and the state repression of the late 1970s) increased the number of Italian libertarians moving to rural communes. In the mid-1980s, Italians developed a stronger environmental sensitivity, as confirmed by the foundation of the Green Lists (later Green Party) in 1985, and the successful 1987 referendum against nuclear power. A group of *autonomi* with an interest in environmentally sustainable ways of life created a collective (AAM) that later founded its own rural community and a magazine (still published as *AAM-Terranuova*) to connect all communes, and even organised national gatherings to facilitate exchanges.³⁴⁹

This new interest in ecology led the Italian anarchist movement, including its cultural organs *A-Rivista* and *Volontà*, to translate and publish Murray Bookchin’s works that advocated an environmentalist route to anarchism. Two anarchist reporters wrote a ‘dossier’ on rural communes for *A-Rivista* in 1985. They toured Tuscany and Emilia Romagna (centre/north Italy), where they visited six communes, all sharing the goal of finding a more ecologically, economically and socially sustainable way of life. Among them was Aquarius, founded in 1982 in the countryside near San Gimignano, in Tuscany. Like social centres, Aquarius sold their

³⁴⁶ ‘Adriano Si Che Non È Fesso!’, *Umanità Nova*, 30 October 1971.

³⁴⁷ A.R., ‘Le Comuni Come Rivoluzione’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, June 1971, http://www.arivista.org/?nr=005&pag=5_04.htm; For other articles on the same issue, see: G.T., ‘A Proposito Di Pseudo Comuni’, *Umanità Nova*, 12 April 1971; Movimento Anarco-comunista Bergamasco, ‘Su “re Nudo” Ed Altre Porcheriole Borghesi’, *Umanità Nova*, 18 December 1971; A.R., ‘La Comune E La Fabbrica’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, May 1972.

³⁴⁸ Emina et al., *Vivere Insieme!*

³⁴⁹ Bizzozzero and Panizza, ‘Arcobaleno Comuni’, 31, 32, 39.

organic produce and hosted courses (herbal medicine, yoga or organic agriculture) as a means to self-fund and to attract people, thus turning the commune into a social and cultural point of reference.³⁵⁰ The communards also aimed at politicising other communards and local farmers by coordinating meetings that presented daily issues from a political point of view, such as how economic interests stripped agriculture of its culture and potentiality. Their final objective was to show that theirs was an achievable and reproducible model for a new society based on self-sufficiency, and on natural, libertarian and nonviolent values.³⁵¹

In the early 1990s, a group of middle-aged German radicals from the *Autonomie* movement was looking for place in sunny Apulia to found a rural commune. They came in contact with a group of Apulian anarchists involved in the antimilitarist journal *Senzapatria* and started a path of theoretical and practical workshops that led them to establish libertarian commune in 1995: Urupia, a 'social laboratory of Utopia'.³⁵² One of Urupia's first decisions was to be an 'open commune' because their objective, as in the case of Aquarius, was to show to as many people as possible that a libertarian society is possible. They are open to visitors and temporary communards, and organise Summer camps, school visits and cultural events like documentary screenings. Although pretty isolated from main routes, their events have usually a good turnout. However, Urupia communards shared the fear expressed by many urban libertarians about not reaching the local population.³⁵³ Urupia too appeared in fact more successful in reaching people who have already developed a certain level of awareness regarding libertarian or ecological themes. Current communards had first heard of Urupia via word of mouth, networks of eco-villages, presentations, or farmers' markets. They built informal networks with other communities, libertarian and ecological organisations, and supporters to sell or exchange their products – mainly wine, olive oil and baked products – but also to organise political initiatives, such as *genuino clandestino*: a grassroots movement to defend farmers from corporations and to free them from state bureaucracy.³⁵⁴ As part of its political commitment, Urupia has also helped people who want to found their own commune by providing advice and initial training. Recently, also thanks to their support, a group of anarcho-communists set up the libertarian community Le Cingiallegre in Lombardy.³⁵⁵ Overall, Italian rural libertarian communities seemed to be more 'traditional' than their British counterparts in their relationship with the land, but equally politically active. Like urban communities, however, they experienced difficulties in the involvement of local residents, whereas their active political role within the wider radical movement marks a clear difference with pre-1968 experiments.

³⁵⁰ Bizzozzero and Panizza, 40–45.

³⁵¹ Aquarius, 'Orticoltura Naturale', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, February 1987, 19.

³⁵² 'Urupia, Una Comune Libertaria Nel Salento', *Urupia* (blog), accessed 21 November 2014, <https://urupia.wordpress.com/>.

³⁵³ Thea, Interview on Urupia; Manni, 'Report on Urupia's Economic Situation'.

³⁵⁴ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

³⁵⁵ Agostino Manni, Interview on Urupia, 4 April 2016.

4. Conclusion

Libertarian communities became ‘incubators’ of alternatives to the mainstream after the fading of the revolutionary spirit of 1968. They benefited from, and also sustained, the countercultures and the libertarian wave of 1960s, which spread anarchist principles such as direct action, direct democracy and anti-authoritarianism. Anarchism shifted from being a moribund political movement with a glorious past to being a constitutive element of emergent social movements. After 1968, libertarian communities functioned as a catalyst for (potential) radicals, and embodied libertarian alternatives to the status quo – training centres where libertarian principles could be applied, experimented with, and influenced by other ideas. Their activism inspired new generations of activists who chose to become involved in the same communities, start new ones, or participate in social movements. Transnational contacts between the British and Italian movements increased steadily after 1968. The Italian influence over the British movement was strong between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when many Italian exiles like Malatesta found refuge in Britain. This influence is tangible even after 1968 in episodes like the introduction of Italian-inspired social centres in Britain. However, British libertarians too were influential, with Italians drawing on punk subculture, for example. The appearance of urban occupied spaces challenged the *status quo* in even more direct ways than pre-1968 *case del popolo* and mutual-aid societies, and often became common houses for various (counter)cultural and political movements. Their role as cultural, social and political hubs helped to strengthen the radical movement and raise the political awareness of local residents. Interacting with and involving working-class people was often problematic, however, and libertarians sometimes perceived themselves as mere providers of services. Like pre-1968 experiments, rural communes continued being criticised by the radical movement during periods of political turmoil and unrest – especially in Italy, where revolutionary militants were generally more numerous and better organised than in Britain. As social activist Alberto Ruz Buenfil stated, the ‘propitious time for the emerging of new mass movements is not compatible with the growth of small groups like the communes. Individuals are easily captivated by mass meetings, seduced by demonstrations, flags, slogans, ... Messianic leaders’.³⁵⁶ They maintained however their role as spaces of resistance and for self-actualisation for disillusioned libertarians during the repression and ebbing phases that followed the ‘revolutionary’ outbursts. A major novelty came to distinguish post-1968 rural communities from the experiences of the classical anarchist period, though. The distinction between rural and urban gradually faded because activists connected their struggles, as in the case of environmentalism and anti-capitalism. This finally allowed rural communities to become an integral part of the broader radical/anarchist movement. Although urban and rural experiences became less distinct, the particularities of space mattered nevertheless – as I show in the next chapter.

³⁵⁶ Alberto Ruz Buenfil, ‘I Tempi Delle Comuni’, *Volontà* 3, no. 101–109 (1989): 105.

Chapter Two

From local to global.

The effects of ‘space/place’ on libertarian communities

I see ‘space’, ‘place’ and ‘people’ as the three constituting elements of every libertarian community. In this chapter, I will look at the shaping ability of these three elements on libertarian communities – and at the mutual influence they have on each other. Although anarchism is internationalist by definition and aim, my analysis will reveal the fundamental importance of place and immediate social, cultural and political contexts in influencing the communities’ internal organisation and activities. After a brief clarification of the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’, I will present a four-part analysis – the first three parts focusing each on a different case study, with the conclusive part comparing all communities. I will begin by looking at the interrelation between the three elements within the urban community of Ex-Caserna Liberata, then I will explore their influence at a local level with another urban community (Kebele), and my third part will be a comparison between the first two communities and a rural commune (Urupia). To conclude, I will suggest that libertarian communities are processes, as they are shaped by their constituting elements, and fluidly adapt to different spatial and temporal contexts. This chapter has a clear spatial focus, and will be followed by a chapter with a distinct temporal focus. However, it is almost impossible to separate time and space, or to dehistoricise space because ‘the spatial is integral to the production of history’, as Doreen Massey stated.³⁵⁷ To use David Harvey’s example, the meaning of spaces like Tiananmen square or ‘Ground Zero’ appears only when we relate space and time.³⁵⁸ Therefore, there will be some temporal/historical analysis in this chapter, just as there will be some spatial discussion in the one that follows.

1. Local space/place and global anarchism

Geographer David Harvey notes that: ‘Place has to be one of the most multi-layered and multi-purpose words in our language’.³⁵⁹ Both Harvey and Doreen Massey wrote extensively on ‘space’

³⁵⁷ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 269.

³⁵⁸ David Harvey, ‘Space as a Key Word’, 2004, 2, 4, marxandphilosophy.org.uk/assets/files/society/word.../harvey2004.doc.

³⁵⁹ David Harvey, ‘From Space to Place and Back Again’, in *Mapping the Futures. Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird et al. (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 4. According to scholars Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires, ‘place’ is ‘space to which meaning has been ascribed’. Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, eds., *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), xii. Important contributions to the definition of space are also those of sociologists Bourdieu and Lefebvre. To the former, space is a product of society that translates into physical space its social characteristics, like the visual opposition between downtown and suburbs representing our hierarchical society. Whereas, the latter affirmed that space is also ‘a means of production ... [because t]he spatial arrangement of a city ... increases productive forces, just as do the equipment and machines in a factory’. Therefore, he continued, space can be a political instrument. In fact, ‘[t]he state uses space in such a way that it ensures its control of places’. Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Physical Space, Social Space and Habitus’ (Vilhelm Aubert Memorial Lecture, University of Oslo, 1996), 12, 13, <http://www.sv.uio.no/iss/forskning/aktuelt/arrangementer/aubert/tidligere/dokumenter/aubert1995.pdf>; Lefebvre, *State, Space, World*, 188.

and ‘place’, and agreed on the complexity and stratification of the two terms. Massey explained: ‘different places are formed of distinct nodes of relations, distinct positionings, within the wider global spaces. Each place is a different articulation of relations and connections’.³⁶⁰ However, Massey criticised Harvey’s description of space/place as static (space/place as ‘Being’ and time as ‘Becoming’), and wrote of space and place as processes: ‘space is a product of practices, relations, connections and disconnections. We make space in the conduct of our lives, and at all scales, from the intimate to the global’.³⁶¹ In my case studies analysis, I will draw on Massey’s idea of spaces and places as processes, and apply it.

Doreen Massey noted that academics generally associate ‘place’ with a local dimension and ‘space’ with something more global or abstract.³⁶² Thus, in my research, I could use ‘place’ for my case studies, and ‘space’ for the national context in which they exist or existed. Whenever I visited a social centre, I noticed that activists often adopted ‘place’ when talking of the physical structure hosting the community (buildings, courtyards and gardens), while they used ‘space’ for those places that fulfilled a communitarian function (the social centre, the workshop, the assembly room). Still, I have sometimes heard activists using the two terms as interchangeable synonyms. I put Massey’s classification and the activists’ use together, and use ‘place’ mainly as a neutral term for both buildings and areas (house, district), and ‘space’ as a term charged with a socio-political meaning for those places that help define or are defined by the libertarian community (commune, social centre, working-class area). What I argue is that different combinations of space/place will inevitably produce different varieties of libertarian societies. This openly contrasts to Daniel Guérin’s identification of ever-valid principles characterising an anarchist society, and the necessity of fixed factors for its realisation. Starting from Bakunin’s works, he claimed that anarchism ‘depends on organization, on self-discipline, on integration, on federalist and noncoercive centralization. It rests upon large-scale modern industry, up-to-date techniques, the modern proletariat, and internationalism on a world scale’.³⁶³ What I will present here is an alternative – an analysis which suggests the profound importance of micro-factors on the existence, functioning and demise of libertarian societies. In particular, of their close and contingent relationship to space/place.

2. Urban communities as places and spaces: Ex-Caserma Liberata

In this first section, I will focus on the physical structure of a Barese social centre founded in 2014 – Ex-Caserma Liberata. I will show that people, places and spaces interact within the community to shape the community itself. A memory by the Milanese architect Giancarlo de Carlo offers a

³⁶⁰ Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 168.

³⁶¹ Doreen Massey, ‘Space, Time and Political Responsibility in the Midst of Global Inequality’, *Erdkunde* 60, no. 2 (1 April 2006): 89, 90.

³⁶² Doreen Massey, ‘Geographies of Responsibility’, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 86, no. 1 (1 March 2004): 5–18.

³⁶³ Guérin, *Anarchism from Theory to Practice*.

good starting point, as he decided to spend a Sunday watching the way residents used a block of flats he had designed:

I suffered all the violence they generated in attacking the building to make it their home. The secluded balconies facing the south were covered with laundry out to dry and the people were all on the access galleries facing north. They had put out stools and chairs to watch and take part in the spectacle of each other and of the street. ... It was then I understood how mistaken my approach had been, in spite of its apparently rational basis. Orientation matters, and so does a view of the landscape and light privacy; but what matters most is to be able to see each other, to be together; It is communication which counts most.³⁶⁴

De Carlo observed the residents taking possession of a building and turning it into their home by transforming its purpose to suit their own needs. He perceived this as an act of violence. Rather than spending time in isolation on their private balconies, their need for socialisation pushed the residents towards the common area at the front. In fact, besides simply changing the purpose of a space, people often physically changed the place itself when it was not in line with their own needs. Although this might sound like a radical action, ‘ordinary’ people do it frequently. A typical example is a city park in which, rather than following its artistic but tortuous paths, people create alternative paths (‘desire lines’) by cutting through the grass to save time. Hence, the actions of people – be them residents or just passers-by – have a strong transformative power over places and spaces. At the same time, though, people taking possession or using a pre-existing building usually have to adapt themselves and their habits to the place and its peculiarities. In other words, it is not always people transforming the place with their actions, but places that influence people’s lives. Although in de Carlo’s example the need to socialise emerges as a key transformative factor, the ‘misuse’ of the south-facing balconies had probably a more basic explanation. That could have simply been the only sunny space residents had access to to hang their laundry to dry. Thus, people adapted their habits to make the most of the physical characteristics of the place that had become their home.

2.1 Re-discovering the former Rossani barracks: A journey from ‘place’ to ‘space’

Like de Carlo, I had an epiphany while observing people turning a previously empty building into a community, a place into a space. This happened when I first visited the newly occupied Ex-Caserma Liberata of Bari in 2014 – an eight-hectare social centre that had once been the Rossani barracks. Before my visit, I had only read a few articles on local online newspapers. These mostly presented the occupation with a mixture of positivity and caution after decades of neglect and health hazards.³⁶⁵ I was born and raised in the Barese district of Picone, whose Eastern boundary

³⁶⁴ Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), 38, 39.

³⁶⁵ Russi, ‘I Ragazzi Di Villa Roth Occupano L’ex Rossani’; Antonio Loconte, ‘Bari, Ecco in Che Stato Si Trova La Ex Caserma Rossani Occupata Sabato Sera’, *Il Quotidiano Italiano - Bari*, 2 February 2014, <http://bari.ilquotidianoitaliano.com/attualita/2014/02/news/bari-ecco-in-che-stato-si-trova-la-ex-caserma-rossani-occupata-sabato-sera-37274.html/>.

with Carrassi is the car-congested street Giulio Petroni and the long wall of the former Rossani barracks. I grew up wondering what that high wall and closed gates hid, until one day – still a primary school child – I went to play at a classmate’s house, which overlooked the barracks. Then I finally saw what appeared to me as an ideal playground: a vast area, almost completely covered in overgrown vegetation, with abandoned one- and two-storey buildings.

Since then, several citizens’ committees, enterprises and mayors had proposed diverse projects to re-open the old barracks and thus redevelop a large area near the main train station and the centre of the city.³⁶⁶ Yet, the Rossani remained an inaccessible place infested with rats and contaminated with asbestos, which the municipality finally had removed in the early 2000s. It was only in February 2014 that a composite group of young activists managed to occupy the Rossani – although they prefer to say they ‘freed’ it (*liberata*) – and re-opened it as a social centre. Roughly twenty years after my first peek from a balcony, and a few months after its occupation, I finally accessed those premises. In this chapter, I include pictures of particularly meaningful places, since images help make sense of my descriptions. The mural was a novelty. The Rossani had been occupied for months already, but the mural had been completed only at the beginning of August – its impressive dimensions covered the old peeled wall on via Giulio Petroni, next to the entrance (photo 1). The brand-new mural read *lottare, occupare, resistere* (fight, occupy, resist), three gigantic words that seized the former military wall and transformed it into an uppercase *dazibao* (‘wall newspaper’). It sought to inspire citizens and warn its politicians and police officers. Another mural further down the wall (photo 2) functioned as an even clearer political statement to the citizenry, and a warning to neo-fascists who had a local branch in the nearby. This mural featured the anti-fascist symbol (red and black flags) together with the smiling face of Benedetto Petrone, a young Barese communist killed by neo-fascists in 1977, and the writing *Benny vive* (‘Benny lives’; Benny is the short form for Benedetto).

I felt deeply emotional when I crossed what I had always perceived as an incontrovertible boundary. I entered through a small metallic door in the wall between the two murals. Not the main iron gate, still locked, but a door left ajar that I expected to reveal, once opened, a bustling space of political activism. Instead, I found myself in a sort of small concrete courtyard, with nothing but few broken chairs and pieces of furniture. I followed the only path that, from the hallway, led me towards a real core of the social centre, as I would later find out (photo 3). Along the path, flanked by overgrown vegetation and abandoned buildings, I encountered the first visitors of Ex-Caserma walking with their dogs or sitting in groups. These seemed to me like a combination of stereotypical ‘junkies’ and ‘crusties’, as I sometimes heard Left-wing activists derogatorily call drug-users and punky-looking non-activists. Many had an unkempt appearance, with dreadlocks or mohawks, numerous piercings and chains, hoodies and dark-coloured clothes. They stared at me with diffidence while chatting loudly, drinking and smoking.

³⁶⁶ For a reconstruction of the plans and projects that concerned the Rossani area, see: Signorile, *Diario Rossani*.



Photo 1. Outer wall of Ex-Caserma Liberata on via Giulio Petroni in Bari.
The mural reads: *Lottare, Occupare, Resistere* (Fight, Occupy, Resist).



Photo 2. Outer wall of Ex-Caserma Liberata on via Giulio Petroni. Murals, left: '[Ex-Ca]serma' and squatting symbol. Right: *Benny vive* (Benny [Petrone] lives), anti-fascist logo and Benny's face.



Photo 3. Pathway leading to the open space. The banner reads: *Il fascismo non passerà* (Fascism shall not pass).



Photo 4. The 'piazza' with the main building, a banner against drug dealing, and several murals. Visible at the centre is the door painted in red and black, the colours of the antifascist flag. To the right, murals of American political activist Angela Davies and of boxer Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter (symbol of the fight against justice system and establishment racism).

I arrived in a large open space surrounded by several buildings of different heights, like a traditional piazza in a southern Italian village. Exactly like a piazza, the main courtyard worked as a space for social relations and communitarian interaction.³⁶⁷ This was obviously possible because it was Summer, and weather allowed it, whereas during my second visit in February the ‘piazza’ was empty (photo 4). Activists crossed the open space, coming and going between the only two inhabited buildings, and stopping from time to time to relax and socialise on chairs and hand-made benches. Politically-charged murals decorated this space, with the iconic head of civil rights activist Angela Davis near the entrance of the restored cinema/theatre, and boxer Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter (symbol of the fight against justice system and establishment racism) near the doors of the ‘people’s gym’. In addition, two banners warned the frequenters that ‘This is no dealing area’ and that ‘Fascism shall not pass’. The former shows a continuity with 1980s and 1990s experiences, which were plagued by heroin-related deaths, whereas the latter is a quote from Dolores Ibarruri’s 1936 famous speech during the Spanish civil war.³⁶⁸ Even the decision to paint the door of the bar/concert hall black and red is a clear reference to the anti-fascist movement, which – after informal talks with some activists – emerged as the main unifying ground for the many groups and individuals managing the Ex-Caserma.

2.2 People, places and spaces shaping the libertarian community

The case of Ex-Caserma is emblematic of transformative relations that exist between activists, places and spaces. After my first visit to Ex-Caserma, and the interviews I undertook with some of its activists, I reflected on what I had seen. I realised that the activists involved in the social centre had managed to radically transform the appearance and function of the former barracks, but – at the same time – the original structures constituting the old barracks had affected this transformative process. In order to illustrate how space, place and people interact to shape the whole community, I want to first look at the transformative role of people turning places into spaces, then move to how places can affect both people and spaces, and conclude with the mutual influence between people and spaces.

2.2.1 People turning places into spaces

With regards to the transformative role of people over places, this connection within Ex-Caserma was immediately evident to me. Having seen what Rossani barracks had looked like before the occupation, my experience was similar to that of de Carlo watching a place becoming a space – a community, even. The Milanese people described by de Carlo had turned an empty building into their home by taking possession of that tower of flats, and adapting it to their needs – whatever

³⁶⁷ Carlo Capello, ‘Torino, Maghreb. La Costruzione Di Identità Trasversali Tra I Migranti Marocchini’, in *Più Di Un Sud: Studi Antropologici Sull’immigrazione a Torino*, ed. Paola Sacchi and Pier Paolo Viazzo (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2003), 76; Michele Bonazzi, *La Digitalizzazione Della Vita Quotidiana* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2014), 41.

³⁶⁸ Dolores Ibarruri, ‘Il Fascismo Non Passerà!’, Marxists Internet Archive, 15 March 2009, <https://www.marxists.org/italiano/ibarruri/fascismo-no-pasara.htm>.

the initial destination for those places had been. They did so by ‘[covering t]he secluded balconies facing the south ... with laundry’, and ‘put[ting] out stools and chairs to watch and take part in the spectacle of each other and of the street’. Whether the first action reveals an implicit creation of a (customised) space, the second shows signs of an emerging community in its ‘traditional sense’, as ‘a place or neighbourhood with which one feels some sense of identification’.³⁶⁹

In a similar fashion, the Barese activists of Ex-Caserma were turning abandoned barracks into a social centre, which consisted of both a (political) space and a community. The activists had displayed banners and painted murals that reclaimed the ownership of the barracks, thus transforming an old symbol of authoritarianism and militarism into a common house for antifascist, antimilitarist, antiracist, and ‘green’ libertarians. Murals, graffiti and banners are a common sight in social centres, where they carry out a double function. Their first function is straightforward, as murals and graffiti are an easy way to decorate the internal or external space of old and derelict buildings; in addition, they transmit a sense of belonging to a specific political identity. Like the murals of Belfast analysed by Lesley Murray, the murals that often cover the walls of social centres mark the territory and visualise spatial divisions by producing ‘stories across generations’.³⁷⁰ Example of this production (and safeguarding) of stories is the mural of Benedetto Petrone (photo 2), which preserves his memory for the younger generations of Barese activists. This function is similar to that of nationalist murals in west Belfast, where historical scenes associated with the Irish conflict and commemorations of the people killed during combat have an ‘educational aspect’. They also produce a territorialisation of the city space. Hence, the face of ‘Benny’ on the walls of Ex-Caserma works as a deterrent and a warning for nearby fascists.

By delimitating the physical and ideological boundaries of the social centre, murals and banners also contribute to creating a shared identity and a sense of community among its activists and regular visitors. In fact, murals can also generate bitter disputes within social centres, as Gennaro of Ex-Caserma Liberata recalled in his interview. He remembered that a long period of discussions followed the completion of a mural in a central position of the main building (‘on the best wall’), as the activists deemed it ‘not political enough’. It was a psychedelic alien, and it was soon covered with a new mural by the highly-political collective ‘Dott. Porka’s’.³⁷¹ Murals and banners provide a visual representation of a set of ‘core values’, which are essential in any community to reduce internal misunderstandings and distance itself from ‘a group of significant others’ (the fascists, in this case). Social centres thus appear similar to what Mike Featherstone called ‘symbolic communities’, which he described as a group of people investing a specific place with symbolic associations.³⁷² However, while Featherstone’s symbolic communities have a form

³⁶⁹ Paul Hoggett, ‘Contested Communities’, in *Contested Communities: Experiences, Struggles, Policies*, ed. Paul Hoggett (Bristol: The Policy Press, 1997), 3.

³⁷⁰ Lesley Murray, ‘Reading the Mobile City through Street Art: Belfast’s Murals’, in *Researching and Representing Mobilities*, ed. Lesley Murray and Sara Upstone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 99–128.

³⁷¹ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³⁷² Mike Featherstone, ‘Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity’, in *Identities*, ed. Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 345.

of nostalgia for an idealised locally-bounded past, murals and banners idealise historical characters and ideas, and reduce them to a-historical and delocalised symbols in the form of logos and mottoes. Hence, at Ex-Caserma slogans and images from different periods and places co-existed. They were part of wider, radical, ‘collective imagination’, which I will analyse in the last section of this chapter.

2.2.2 Places influencing spaces and people

I want now to explore the role that places have in influencing both spaces and people within libertarian communities. Again, Ex-Caserma represents a useful case study, since I had the opportunity to observe the social centre in its early stages, when activists themselves started realising that the occupation of such a vast place represented a real challenge. The initial enthusiasm had attracted hundreds of citizens, like Frank, who attended the public assemblies and participated in the first initiatives, such as the creation of a ‘social garden’. I interviewed Frank – a Barese man in his thirties with an interest in Left-wing politics, ecology and alternative economies – as he is one of the many citizens that distanced themselves from Ex-Caserma in the first months. He explained that, after experiencing a strong excitement for the ‘recovery of this beautiful space of my city, abandoned for decades’, he felt he was let down by the way the occupiers managed the space.

Like others, Frank lamented the presence of a ‘muddled’ organisational process, and denounced the existence of an internal ‘closed group’ of activists who made most decisions – decisions he felt should have been made by the public assembly.³⁷³ For these reasons, an increasing number of citizens stopped being involved



Map. Central area of Bari. In black, the area covered by Ex-Caserma Liberata social centre.

in the management of Ex-Caserma, but the activists failed to re-think their role, and reacted by further closing themselves off. Emblematic is Gennaro’s comment, when he stated that ‘Bari is a strange city ... the first three months it loves you because you’re the novelty, the next three months

³⁷³ Frank, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata, 2 January 2015.

it starts getting tired because you don't do what it wants, and the following week it hates you'.³⁷⁴ In addition, as it is common in newly-occupied places, also the number of activists decreased in the first few months – either due to personal or political disagreements, or simply because of personal commitments. As a consequence, only between a dozen and 30 activists ended up managing the social centre of eight hectares right in the centre of Bari (see Map).

As one can easily imagine, it was a difficult task for a dozen people to manage and defend such a space from the police, from criminals, from political opponents, and – ultimately – from groups of citizens that had different ideas for the former barracks. They had to defend Ex-Caserma from the police because the occupation was illegal; from local criminals because the abandoned barracks had become a dealing area; from neo-fascists because 'punitive expeditions' have been a fairly common tactic to scare away Leftists; and from groups of citizens because a few local committees had grown increasingly hostile due to arguments over the management and objectives of Ex-Caserma. Another activist, Carmen, confirmed that the distrust of citizens later turned into open opposition. She described bumping into a member of a committee, who had been originally happy for the 're-opening' of the barracks, but then yelled at her: 'I wish you'd never occupied [here]!'. In fact, many in the neighbourhood had grown disappointed with the social centre, which increased the presence of police in the area and the sense of isolation of the activists.³⁷⁵ Although I will look in more detail at the relationship between neighbourhood and libertarian communities in the next section, I want here to highlight the importance of the support of local residents – especially when the place is difficult to defend.

Location and structural characteristics – including size – of a libertarian community can in fact heavily influence its lifespan. Henri Lefebvre warned for instance against those places 'whose pre-existing form, having been designed for some other purpose, [might be] inappropriate to [a community's] needs'.³⁷⁶ Ex-Caserma activists adapted nonetheless their defensive strategies to the physical characteristics of the place. They maximised their effort and the defensibility of the social centre by only occupying and refurbishing the few buildings around the *piazza*, and using a small lateral door rather than the main iron gate. As in a medieval citadel, they could thus benefit from the protection of the high surrounding walls, and by the proximity of the functioning buildings. In addition, the physical structure of the former barracks had a direct influence on the organisation of the space within Ex-Caserma. The activists made the most of pre-existing structures, so – for instance – they occupied only those few buildings with roofs intact, and re-used the old military theatre to host plays and film screenings with a political message. A place can also hinder the development of a community, however. While activists and people involved in a committee are generally more confident, certainly a majority of 'average citizens' felt uneasy about the idea of crossing the threshold of Ex-Caserma. A double threshold – both physical and

³⁷⁴ Vito et al., Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³⁷⁵ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

³⁷⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 168.

psychological, as ‘walls separate space’ and charge it with ‘symbolic meaning, defining areas of authorities’.³⁷⁷ The idea of walking into an occupied social centre had kept the most conservative at a distance, but it was the idea of passing through a small door in a high military wall that discouraged the others. Whereas curiosity had initially drawn citizens to the former barracks, their walls later resumed their previous role as separators and concealers, and distanced Ex-Caserma from the rest of the city.

2.2.3 The mutual influence between people and spaces

The final relation internal to libertarian communities for me to explore is the one between people and spaces. I want to begin with briefly outlining the role that spaces have within libertarian communities, as just like places and people, spaces are a key component of communities. I will then move to a more detailed analysis of the influence people have inside communities, and conclude with a general reflection on the different weight that people, spaces and places have. The libertarian community itself (the social centre, the squat, the commune) is a space. A space for living, for doing active politics, for creating and sharing culture, for socialising. A space that may or may not correspond to the physical place that constitutes the community, as in the case of Ex-Caserma organising a buskers’ festival in Bari in 2014. On that occasion, they invited street artists, who performed in dozens of different places across the city centre, with the broader political objective of ‘retaking the streets’ and turning them into a collective space.³⁷⁸ In this sense, to quote Massey, space appears as the ‘dimension of the social’.³⁷⁹ It is ‘continually being made’ as a product of relations, and – as such – it escapes and spills through physical boundaries like the walls of Ex-Caserma. Yet, within this wider and amorphous communitarian space, are other more specific spaces, like assemblies, workshops and courses, which are variable and dependant on the people involved in the community. At the same time, though, both these specific spaces and the communitarian space function as magnets to attract new people. This is fundamental in an environment where the risk of burnout and the number of activists ‘withdrawing to private life’ is very high, thus requiring a constant replacement and turnover of new faces.³⁸⁰

If (social, political, cultural) spaces are necessary to attract new people, spaces are strictly bound to the presence of people offering their own interests, skills and availability – either individually or as a collective. The interests and abilities of the people involved in a libertarian community are the fundamental variable that allows a community to offer activities both to its members and to a wider public. Ultimately, a community relies on people for its survival, be they occupiers or citizens who decide to offer their competencies, or just regular visitors. At Ex-

³⁷⁷ Ross Samson, ‘Knowledge, Constraint, and Power in Inaction: The Defenseless Medieval Wall’, *Historical Archaeology* 26, no. 3 (1992): 26.

³⁷⁸ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³⁷⁹ Massey, ‘Space, Time and Political Responsibility in the Midst of Global Inequality’, 94.

³⁸⁰ For an analysis of the process that pushes many political activists towards ‘burnout’, see: Ayala M. Pines, ‘Burnout in Political Activism: An Existential Perspective’, *Journal of Health and Human Resources Administration* 16, no. 4 (1994): 381–94; For the reasons behind activists’ ‘withdrawal to private life’: Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

Caserma, the members coming from the former Villa Roth social centre, re-proposed a series of activities and workshops they had previously organised at Villa Roth, such as a social library and a social vegetable garden. This was possible because of their abilities, but also because they had managed to take some resources with them, like books and shelving.³⁸¹ In addition to this, new activists and citizens attracted by the occupation proposed other activities, such as a people's gym and a libertarian school. However, when the person or collective behind the initiative stopped collaborating with the social centre, and the collective could find no substitute, the initiative itself floundered. This is what happened to the libertarian school, whose room later turned into a dance studio when other activists offered their time and expertise for this new activity. It is for this reason that anarchist thinkers like Kropotkin preferred a rotation of duties and an exchange of knowledge to specialisation, since relying on one person or a group is dangerous for a libertarian community. Either, as in this case, they can abandon the community or they can profit from their position.³⁸² Although nobody quoted Kropotkin, Ex-Caserma activists had learned this lesson from experience, and strove to avoid dominating positions. Nonetheless, the high turnover and precariousness that characterises spaces like the social centres made it harder for the people of Ex-Caserma to overcome this situation.

The influence that activists have on the spaces of a libertarian community exceeds the specific spaces like workshops and clubs. The people participating in a libertarian community rather 'produce' its wider social, political and cultural space by establishing its core values, and determining its line of action. In the case of Ex-Caserma, all participants have clear in mind the core values of the community: 'anti-capitalism, antifascism, anti-sexism, antiracism', as an activist who asked to be called Francesco summarised. They know that, although all decisions are supposedly made by consensus in the public assembly, the activists will only accept 'proposals that are in line with, or not-against,' those core principles.³⁸³ Indeed, Francesco's statement reveals one of the many thorny issues involved in the consensus decision-making process, as an organised minority can veto any decision.³⁸⁴ However, I wanted here to focus on the effect that activists' political ideas have on the management of the community and its spaces. These ideas – and their practical consequences – can vary. Thus, when a collective of anarcho-punks joined the other groups that would later occupy the Rossani barracks, they brought a new core value to the project: antispecism. Veganism is still quite uncommon in southern Italy, even among radicals. Becoming a vegan was therefore an individual choice within the social centre. However, the presence of vegan activists opened a debate on antispecism within Ex-Caserma, and activists agreed that 'proposing a lamb [chops] festival' would be unacceptable.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

³⁸² Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 10, 11.

³⁸³ Francesco and Ruggiero, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata.

³⁸⁴ Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!*, 70.

³⁸⁵ Francesco and Ruggiero, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata.

To conclude, libertarian communities are constituted of three fundamental parts – people, places, spaces – and each element affects the whole community. Places can ‘suggest’ or ‘discourage’ the creation of a space, and also facilitate the defence of a community. Spaces can attract new activists and in general constitute the backbone of a community, as they enable the social-cultural-political mission of a libertarian community. However, without a (more or less) cohesive collective of people who identify themselves with the socio-political mission of the community, there would be no place or space, and no community.

3. Urban communities between places, spaces, and memory: Kebele

In this second part of the chapter, I will explore the relation between urban communities and the space that surrounds them. I focus in particular on the Bristol-based social centre Kebele because it is located in the multi-ethnic inner-city area of Easton – next to St Paul’s, known especially for the 1980 riots – and is within a city that all my interviewees had identified as ‘radical’. Conversely, Ex-Caserma is in Bari – a more ethnically homogenous city with a conservative background. Bristol, unlike Bari offers thus a combination of factors that provide a more varied starting point for my analysis on the influence that local spaces and places can have on the development of libertarian communities.

3.1 A place called Easton

It was my second time in Bristol, in March 2015, when I decided to take a coach from London to visit Kebele for an open day there. Once in Bristol, I crossed the central part of the city to arrive at Temple Meads station and take a local train to reach Stapleton Road station in Easton. As I walked towards Temple Meads, I noticed the atmosphere of central Bristol, with its streets full of white-collar workers, tourists and students, and its parade of colourful shop windows – all the brands that make most English high-streets look alike. My train cut through the city and took me to the north-east of Bristol in a few minutes. When I got off, I felt I was in a different city altogether. Had I walked, I would have probably slowly adapted to the change of urban landscape, whereas that train had taken me from the vibrant city-centre to a less looked-after and much quieter area, with fewer people in the streets. Shops were mostly off-licence stores selling ethnic food, and fried-chicken shops; and the landscape included flyovers overgrown with weeds, and several terraced houses in disrepair.

Easton’s urban landscape is unlike the nearby gentrified Montpelier, just one train stop after Easton as the train turns westward to the affluent Clifton area by the River Avon. However, it is also thanks to this that Kebele was first established as a social centre in 1995, as four people squatted an abandoned building that would later become Kebele. Talking about the initial squatters, Tim – a London-born activist at Kebele – said that ‘some people would hear “squatters” and think: “alcoholics, and drug users, and drop-outs”. I wouldn’t say that any of them were like that. They might have appeared to look like that, but they were quite sort of politically self-aware,

and quite active'. Furthermore, Tim added, 'there were several more who lived here, not necessarily permanently, but on and off ... It was a fairly mixed bunch'.³⁸⁶

Had Easton been an affluent or gentrifying area, the bank owning the squatted building would probably have found a certain way to evict those people looking like 'alcoholics, and drug users, and drop-outs' in order to sell the property to a development company for a high profit. Instead, that 'mixed bunch' of 'politically self-aware, and quite active' young people ('they were all in their twenties') had time to organise and run a social centre. Another activist, who asked to be called Barry, claimed that 'there was a lengthy battle with the bank, which ... culminated in the bank, under pressure, selling the building to Kebele for 19,000 pounds, which wasn't a lot back then neither'.³⁸⁷ In spite of the bargain price for a two-storey building, the activists had to gather the sum by using money from their own benefits, fundraising events, and even a mortgage from an ethical bank. Hence, it was the place (Easton) that made it possible for Kebele to be founded, and to exist for over twenty years, since 1995. In fact, without the ownership of the building, Kebele would have experienced major difficulties in resisting further eviction attempts, and in surviving the periods of low activist participation that every libertarian community experiences at some points.

3.2 A space for ethnic minorities and white radicals

It is clear, then, that the physical dimension of an area (place) has a direct influence on the development of an urban community. I want therefore to look at the effects that the ethnic and socio-economic dimensions of an area (space), in this case Easton, can have on a community – the Kebele social centre. The choice of Kebele for this analysis is once again particularly fitting, as Bristol has a longstanding history of a multi-ethnic population – unlike Bari, for example. The relation between the Barese social centres and ethnic minorities relates instead to first-generation immigration – something I will return to in the next chapter.

3.2.1 Easton as a multi-ethnic space

Walking from Stapleton Road station to Kebele, I had a sudden and clear perception of my ethnicity as a white European man, when I realised that most people around me were of Afro-Caribbean, north-east African, and south Asian heritage. What was just an impression, later found confirmation in the statistics provided by the Bristol City Council, as 37.9% of Easton's residents belong to 'black and minority ethnic groups' against a Bristol average of 16%, with a vast majority self-identifying as Pakistani, Black Caribbean and Black Africans. There is also a high number of Polish people.³⁸⁸ This geographical concentration of ethnicities is rooted in the labour shortages induced by the post-war boom of the 1950s, which attracted masses of Commonwealth migrants,

³⁸⁶ Tim, Interview on Kebele.

³⁸⁷ Barry, Interview on Kebele, 28 April 2015.

³⁸⁸ Performance, information and intelligence service, 'Easton Statistical Ward Profile 2016', June 2016, <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/436737/Easton.pdf/a27d08ae-9a03-405f-a96f-a41018364763>.

especially from the ‘West Indies’. Matt Clement shows that in Bristol ‘West Indian immigrants were ... clustered together in the run-down inner-city enclave ... because they were treated as outsiders and systematically discriminated against in jobs and housing allocation’.³⁸⁹ The areas of Easton and St Paul’s were particularly affected by this phenomenon, as the above average percentage of non-white residents there testifies. Additionally, the presence of Polish migrants denotes that Easton is still an area of first-generation immigration. It has not been gentrified – yet.

Despite Easton’s multi-ethnic past and present, once at Kebele, I found that almost everyone at the open day was white. This immediately struck me, since I considered that a failure of the *Kebele Community Co-operative’s Aims and Objectives* document, which claimed that Kebele aimed ‘[t]o provide space, resources & facilities for the local community on a not-for-profit basis, ensuring no one is excluded due to limited finances’.³⁹⁰ Every time I had the chance to raise this issue with Kebele’s activists I realised I had touched a sore spot. Barry acknowledged that ‘for the area where Kebele is situated, [there are] more white people that come to Kebele than I would like’.³⁹¹ Tim tried to explain this phenomenon by contextualising Kebele’s situation. He said that ‘it’s fundamentally true that the anarchist movement in Britain is largely white, and that’s a problem they’ve never quite resolved. Although there is lots of refugees and asylum seekers solidarity, and antifascist/antiracist work, it remains a predominantly white movement’.³⁹²

Tim nevertheless added that there is a high participation of local residents involved in Kebele’s activities, which makes some of its spaces – like the café – particularly ‘multiracial’. However, he acknowledged that ‘when it comes down to political organisation, it seems to be really defined by one race’.³⁹³ The participation of local non-white people has been limited to the occasional ‘consumption’ of the space, rather than sustained political involvement. This does not mean that Kebele has no relation with local residents. In fact, most of the people running the social centre are local. Either born in Bristol or, more frequently, coming from other parts of Great Britain and abroad, most activists behind Kebele live in or near Easton. They are also almost universally white. Tim confirmed that ‘we are a fundamentally white-based movement, no matter how hard we try. And we do try really hard’. His Pakistani neighbours would never go to Kebele, as ‘they feel uncomfortable’.³⁹⁴ Far from being a Bristol or Easton-specific issue, this ethnic imbalance among libertarians is something I have observed in all the libertarian spaces I have visited. I will return to this in my fourth chapter.

Nobody at Kebele seems to have a clear opinion about the reasons behind this lack of involvement of the local non-white population – and neither about the strategies to overcome this. Barry affirmed: ‘We’ve had a lot of discussions over the years on why this is, and we’d love that

³⁸⁹ Matt Clement, ‘Bristol: “Civilising” the Inner City’, *Race&Class* 48, no. 4 (2007): 100.

³⁹⁰ Kebele collective, ‘Kebele Community Co-Operative’s Mission, Aims and Objectives’, accessed 23 September 2016, https://network23.org/kebele2/files/2013/03/kebelecoop_aims-etc.pdf.

³⁹¹ Barry, Interview on Kebele.

³⁹² Tim, Interview on Kebele.

³⁹³ Tim.

³⁹⁴ Tim.

to change, but that doesn't happen overnight. It takes a long time'.³⁹⁵ A younger activist – who asked to be referred to as Jo – observed that '[t]he majority of the people who use the space are white and middle-class. [long pause] Definitely. [long pause] This is obviously a problem. It has come up from time to time in discussions, but there's never been an overt attempt to address it'.³⁹⁶ Everybody at Kebele is aware of this problem, but from Barry, Jo and Tim's pauses and tone of voice we hear the extent to which this remains a knotty problem. In this situation, Kebele risks appearing to be a 'white enclave' in a multi-ethnic area. This might further discourage the participation of non-white residents in a self-perpetuating process. As a consequence, the needs and struggles of over a third of Easton's residents risk to be unknown to Kebele, thus turning it into a space within a space. A radical space (Kebele) coexisting within but separate from a space (Easton) with no definite political identity (in fact with multiple identities). In this scenario, Kebele – like most urban libertarian communities – represents the spatialisation of libertarian/anarchistic politics (it embodied anarchistic practices in a concrete space) within a mostly non-radical space.³⁹⁷

3.2.2 *Easton as a (white) radical space*

If a large part of Easton residents is so indifferent to Kebele's radical politics, how has the social centre managed to thrive for over two decades? Owning a place is surely fundamental. However, without the continuous involvement of new activists, and the presence of a supporting network, a community will inevitably come to an end. We see this in the San Pasquale neighbourhood committee of Bari, which did not survive the late-1970s repression that led to mass arrests, preventive detentions in high-security prisons, and long prison sentences for radical Left militants. This was part of a national strategy, known as *teorema Calogero*, that used a scorched earth policy in the attempt to halt the spread of armed struggle organisations in Italy. Besides physically arresting many militants, this strategy had the effect of scaring away activists and even local residents, who often stopped frequenting radical spaces in order not to draw the attention of the police.³⁹⁸ British activists too have experienced periods of repression – but of a different nature. This includes a case of undercover agents who infiltrated the radical green movement.³⁹⁹ Kebele survived nonetheless. Here I want to illustrate how the political space of Bristol has contributed to this because of the presence of a network of radicals, and of a deeply-rooted radical imaginary. Kebele as a radical space owes much to the wider radical movement that animated Britain in the mid-1990s, and here I want to highlight in particular the influence that a wider radical space has on radical community.

³⁹⁵ Barry, Interview on Kebele.

³⁹⁶ Jo, Interview on Kebele, 2 March 2016.

³⁹⁷ For another example of the spatialisation of politics, see: Maria Kaika and Lazaros Karaliotas, 'Spatialising Politics: Antagonistic Imaginaries of Indignant Squares', in *The Post-Political and Its Discontents*, ed. Japhy Willson and Erik Swyngedouw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

³⁹⁸ Bianchi and Caminiti, *Gli Autonomi. Volume 1*, 9.

³⁹⁹ For further information on the case: Jones and Wilson, 'Relationships with Undercover Officers Wreck Lives. The Lies Must Stop'; Evans and Lewis, 'Undercover Officer Spied on Green Activists'.

The radicalism of Kebele is evident by looking at the range of activities that the social centre has organised and hosted in these years. When I first entered Kebele, I stepped into a cosy café with a few tables crowded with a dozen people of all ages chatting in twos or small groups. This included a family with small children eating vegan cakes. This was quite different from what I found when I entered Ex-Caserma in Bari for the first time. What helped make Kebele's café family friendly was that it was perfectly legal and with good food hygiene ratings – unlike any space in the occupied Ex-Caserma. According to Barry, the café was one of first things that the initial squatters started after 'realising that the potential of the building was far greater than just providing a place to live'.⁴⁰⁰ Vegan cafes, or squat cafes, or simply *cafes*, appeared in several occupied spaces across Britain in the second half of the 1990s. They offered cheap vegan food, cultural events, and a space to socialise and organise. Hodgkinson and Chatterton defined them as the 'precursors of social centres' because of their role as a 'living example of anarchist politics'.⁴⁰¹

From the café, I accessed another room on the ground floor – the infoshop. Infoshops, like squat cafes, have had a function similar to that of Italian social centres by providing radical activists with useful information and meeting spaces.⁴⁰² At Kebele this consisted in a spacious room with chairs and armchairs, and a corner with free informative leaflets and radical books for sale. The same room, Jo later told me, was used as a meeting room by the collectives that run Kebele, and other like-minded groups working on related issues, such as the Bristol Anarchist Bookfair, climate action, and No Borders.⁴⁰³ Upstairs, finally, were four smaller rooms that Kebele activists had used for different activities across the years, but that – when I interviewed Tim – were respectively used as library, art room, health room, and office.⁴⁰⁴ In this fashion, the spaces of Kebele attracted dozens of people besides the inner circle of the activists running the social centre.

The pre-existence of such radical groups, and the presence of a wider radical movement across Britain and Europe were a fundamental incentive to the creation and development of Kebele. It was Tim, once more, who mentioned 'lots of interesting projects going on in Easton. Not necessarily well-connected with each other, but collectively they do provide a sense of something alternative that is happening and ongoing, and Kebele is one of a number of those projects'.⁴⁰⁵ He explained:

There's a number of pubs, for example, within Easton, that've got quite a long reputation for being pubs or bars that the radical movement frequents and goes to, and they still have regular nights with money-raising for political causes. There's one pub called The Plough, which is also the home of something called The Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls, and they're seen as a bit of a sort of radical anarchist mixed-gender football club, and they've

⁴⁰⁰ Barry, Interview on Kebele.

⁴⁰¹ Hodgkinson and Chatterton, 'Autonomy in the City? Reflections on the Social Centres Movement in the UK', 306, 307.

⁴⁰² 'Social Centres in the UK', *Organise!*, Summer 2016.

⁴⁰³ Jo, Interview on Kebele.

⁴⁰⁴ Tim, Interview on Kebele.

⁴⁰⁵ Tim.

been involved in alternative World Cups, so they've gone to places in Italy, Chiapas, Gaza, and stuff like that. So there's that wider movement, which Kebele is a part of.⁴⁰⁶

Like most urban libertarian communities, it has become a reference point for the local (white/anarchistic) countercultures, and enriched the local radical scene. By functioning as a hub for local radicals, Kebele partly fed on the previously-existing radical milieu that characterises Bristol, and partly managed to put in touch such realities, thus contributing to the creation of a radical network. A network that, as Tim revealed, extended as far as Palestine and Mexico.

3.3 The space of identitarian memory

Kebele built a mutually-constituting relation with surrounding (mostly white) radical spaces in Easton and Bristol; but what made that radical space possible in the first place? In this section I will present the importance, for an urban community, of starting and developing in a space with a radical identity and a sense of memory.

3.3.1 Bristol's radical identity as a magnet for radicals

All the Kebele-related activists I interviewed were born in other parts of England and Wales, and they all admitted being drawn to Bristol because of its radical reputation. A 32-year-old activist – who asked to be called Michael – said that he 'can't quite say what the lineage is', but summed up the characteristics that made him 'feel [that] there's been a quite radical history here'. He claimed that:

There's been quite a few riots throughout history, and the slave trade was based here. In some ways it's quite right-wing as well – we've got some of the richest areas in the country up in Clifton, the arms trade is massive here. The slave trade was a big thing here, but also the anti-slave movement was very strong here. And the anti-arms trade movement has been active at times.⁴⁰⁷

Michael's reconstruction of Bristol's radical past underlined the apparently paradoxical nature of activism, as it often takes a particularly reactionary context to ignite a radical response. Thus, well-established slave and arms trades triggered strong opposition movements, which – in turn – attracted further radicals, and this fed a virtuous circle.

In addition to this, radical historian Steve Hunt proposed a spatial reading of Bristol's history to explain the city's contemporary 'lively anarchist scene'. Besides being an important hub for the slave trade, Bristol was southern England's second largest city (after London), which brought its citizens many advantages of industrialisation, as well as its downsides (from the destruction of West Country's natural environment to the appearance of dislocated rural masses

⁴⁰⁶ Tim.

⁴⁰⁷ Michael, Interview on Kebele, 6 February 2016.

as impoverished urban proletariat).⁴⁰⁸ In this historical situation, Bristol's location proved decisive, as it was an easily reachable metropolis, a crossroads for ideas between Wales, the Midlands and Cornwall. Thus, Bristol 'was on the itinerary of radicals who ... directly addressed mass assemblies of a discontented population [using] mass platform as an agitational device to attack the establishment'.⁴⁰⁹ In the end, the same spatial factors that helped make Bristol an important economic centre – such as being well connected crossroads – facilitated its radicalisation.

Today, those memories of a radical past, together with a prominent contemporary activism, still work as a magnet for British radicals. Memories that are bequeathed to new generations of activists, but have also left marks in the city's landscape, and are still visible. Tim, although from London, recounted of 'a pub in the city centre called The Seven Stars, near Victoria street, which has a placard outside, and that was a meeting place of anti-slavery activists back in the eighteenth century'.⁴¹⁰ In addition, Bristol's contemporary countercultural scene completed the picture, since Michael – who also has an interest in art – described Bristol as 'a centre for street art and graffiti. You know, Banksy is famously from here, and Massive Attack, and a lot of slightly-subversive art stuff is from here as well. So, it attracts people interested in those things as well'.⁴¹¹ The result of these historical processes, still ongoing and evolving, is a city space that encourages – through memories and actions – the flourishing of the radical milieu in which Kebele thrived.

3.3.2 Radical activism feeding on the memory of local struggles

Another element that emerged often during my interview to Kebele activists was the pride they took in the radical past that, in their opinion, characterised the area they had chosen to live – and do active politics – in. While Bristol had, and still has, a radical reputation, at Kebele they know that not every part of Bristol is equally radical. Michael spoke of Clifton (west Bristol) as one of the richest areas in the country. Instead, they saw Easton, together with the neighbouring St Paul's, as 'an area with a quite radical history'.⁴¹² Tim, although born and raised a Londoner, demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the history of Easton and St Paul's. He identified Easton with an originally 'all white working-class area', that later became:

One of the areas in Bristol that first attracted and developed quite a large multiracial population ... a lot of the ethnic minorities were placed here in housing by the Council. Next to Easton you have the area of St Paul's, which historically was the neighbourhood of the Afro-Caribbean group in Bristol. And the Afro-Caribbean population in Bristol

⁴⁰⁸ Steve Hunt, *Anarchism in Bristol and the West Country to 1950*, Bristol Radical Pamphleteer 14 (Bristol: Bristol Radical History Group, 2010), 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Hunt, 29, 30.

⁴¹⁰ Tim, Interview on Kebele.

⁴¹¹ Michael, Interview on Kebele.

⁴¹² Tim, Interview on Kebele.

dates back to the days of slavery. Bristol is quite famous for its involvement in the slave trade, and the struggle to end slavery'.⁴¹³

Then, talking about more local struggles, he added: 'In the early Eighties St Paul's was the site of a number of anti-police riots. And I guess Easton and St Paul's used to be a lot closer because there's now a motorway that divides Easton from St Paul's, the M32, but that was only built in the Sixties'.⁴¹⁴ Here Tim made a reference to the riots that shook the working-class and multi-ethnic area of St Paul's, which Harris Joshua and Tina Wallace saw as the inevitable consequence of tense race and class relations within the British society in the decades that precede the 1980 riots. In this context, the riots sparked by the raid of the *Black and White* café on 2 April 1980. The riots were the last straw after decades of social and institutional race and class discriminations, and embodied the 'crisis about the position ... of black people, especially youth, in the society'.⁴¹⁵

The St Paul's riot was one of several similar episodes that happened in early-1980s Britain, such as those of Brixton in London and Toxteth in Liverpool. Despite national causes, each of these riots had particular local causes and character. In his 1984 article, Reicher provided a detailed reconstruction of the 1980 riots using a variety of sources, including interviews to St Paul's residents. When asked about the origin of the people in the crowd, the interviewees answered: 'the whole community', or 'this was just St Paul's', and 'just everybody local'. They were all local Afro-Caribbean people sharing the same social frustration and episodes of 'police harassment'. A communitarian experience that a resident summed up in a statement after the riot: 'You go to school, you learn and then – nothing. The colour of your skin determines everything. We can't beat [the police] in the court, but we defeated them on the streets'.⁴¹⁶ Although the riot originated in St Paul's, the numerous African-Caribbean community of neighbouring Easton was clearly affected by the same problems, as socio-economic and racial issues know no administrative boundaries. Hence, despite the presence of a motorway between Easton and St Paul's, contemporary activists like Tim still look at the St Paul's riots as a 'local heritage' to preserve and be proud of. In fact, this is revealing of a common attitude among radical spaces existing in areas with a radical past – some sort of 'uncritical historical appropriation'. Even though Kebele activists are mostly white and middle-class, they draw on the history of marginalisation and resistance of the non-white and working class districts of Easton and St Paul's to feed their own sense of 'being in the right place'.

⁴¹³ Tim.

⁴¹⁴ Tim.

⁴¹⁵ Harris Joshua and Tina Wallace, *To Ride the Storm: The 1980 Bristol 'Riot' and the State* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 140.

⁴¹⁶ S. D. Reicher, 'The St. Pauls' Riot: An Explanation of the Limits of Crowd Action in Terms of a Social Identity Model', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 14 (1984): 16.

4. The libertarian community – place, people, spaces: Urupia

In this last section, I want to compare the experience of a rural community, Urupia, with those of Ex-Caserma and Kebele. This will allow me to draw a comparison between rural and urban settings on how space and place influence a libertarian community.

4.1 The place of a rural commune

As with Ex-Caserma, Urupia had a symbiotic relation with the place in which it was situated. The pre-existing buildings that came to constitute Urupia conditioned the future development of the community, and – at the same time – the needs of the community shaped the physical structure of the existing buildings. It is customary at Urupia that, when a guest takes an appointment to visit the commune, one comunard takes them for a tour. There is no predetermined itinerary, but the ‘guide’ aims to provide an overview of the whole community together with its history and its objectives. I had reached Urupia after a two-hour car journey from Bari, as the community is located in the countryside of northern Salento – the southernmost part of Apulia; forty kilometres from the closest city (Taranto) and five from the village of San Marzano di San Giuseppe. The carriageway became narrower and narrower – it started as a motorway and slowly became a dirt road between fields of olive trees and the typical Apulian red soil. Finally, I reached the former *masseria* – a fortified manor farm typical of Apulian countryside. This felt like a remote place.

I followed the sign and parked my car in a large uncultivated field. From there, it was a short walk to a large open space around which were most communal buildings – like the ‘piazza’ of Ex-Caserma. On one side was the main building with the big kitchen and the porch where, weather permitting, the comunards have their meals; but also the large wood-fired oven, the wine cellar, and the camping site. On the other side were the libertarian school and the meeting room. Unlike Ex-Caserma, that was no ‘piazza’ or socialising space. All I ever in that white clearing were dogs and children – socialising among themselves. The adults socialised in the shade of the porch, while reading a book or eating a snack. Then, when the ‘honorary-comunard’ Beppe (honorary because he does not live there) took me for the tour, I had the chance to see their state-of-the-art phytodepuration system, part of their extensive cultivation of the surrounding land, and some of the old stables and pigpens turned into independent apartments for the comunards.⁴¹⁷ I also had the opportunity to see the solar panels they had recently installed, after much internal debate.

The place looked completely different when, in 1994, Agostino and the others anarchist and libertarian founders bought it – the *masseria* was in a state of disrepair. They had decided to purchase the farm buildings and the land in order to ensure stability for their ‘political project of social transformation’, since – Agostino affirmed – ‘occupying jeopardises the future’ of such

⁴¹⁷ Phytodepuration systems aim at reproducing natural self-depurative processes in a controllable environment. At Urupia, they purify their own wastewaters using plants such as reeds.

experiences.⁴¹⁸ It is because of this decision that Urupia is still active after two decades, and has become a reference point for the Italian anarchist movement. As in the case of Kebele, the communards gathered the necessary funds (300 million lire) using their own money, donations, fund-raising events, and loans from a mutual-aid co-operative.

They had many plans for the type of social activities they wanted to realise in their commune, but they soon realised the buildings needed urgent refurbishment and maintenance works. In addition, the property included around thirty hectares of land with ancient olive trees, vineyards, an orchard, and a vegetable garden.⁴¹⁹ Such characteristics inevitably conditioned the future of Urupia and its inhabitants. Rather than launching themselves into creating for example art laboratories, the communards learned to refurbish and cultivate. In particular, they had to learn to cultivate and transform olives and grapes into oil and wine, as converting their farm would have been too much of a waste of time and money. For this reason, the majority of their income comes nowadays from the sale of wine and olive oil, although this means at the same time that bad harvests can jeopardise Urupia's survival.

If on the one hand the place had imposed on Urupia's communards some activities and practices, on the other, the communards adapted the place to their personal, collective and political needs. During my introductory tour to Urupia, Beppe showed me that the communards were in the process of transforming part of the vineyard. With time, they had perfected their agricultural techniques and invested in more efficient equipment. This meant they now needed more space between the rows of grape vines. They had also differentiated the vine varieties to improve their wines. Other examples are the decision to install solar panels, create a phytodepuration system, and convert the former pigpens into apartments. It would seem, then, that both urban and rural communities interact with their place in a two-way relationship. The physical structures the community inhabits affects the use and development of the community, but the people involved have in return the potential to shape the place. Rather than a question of urban or rural settings, in this case the relation between place and community is more affected by the ownership of the place itself. While Kebele and Urupia have been able to invest their time and money in adapting the place to their needs, squatted and occupied communities like Ex-Caserma have had to limit their interventions.

4.2 Communards and the identity of a rural place

Urupia was officially established on 1 May 1995, when its founders slept for the first time in the newly-refurbished buildings. They were a mixed group of Italian anarchists and German libertarians – of which only two are still part of the commune. One of them is Agostino Manni, who retraced for me the genesis of that mixed group while sitting in the wine cellar drinking a few glasses of their own organic wine. Of the Germans, he said they were five libertarian

⁴¹⁸ Manni, 'Report on Urupia's Economic Situation'.

⁴¹⁹ 'Urupia, Una Comune Libertaria Nel Salento'.

communists, and he recalled in particular Rolf and Antje, who had stayed the longest at Urupia. They were older than their Italian counterparts, and both retired, so they thought of moving to Salento because, Agostino said: ‘Germans have got that fixation: “I retire and move to a warm place” ... and they are German, but alternative Germans – they didn’t come to Salento to go the beach, but to make a commune that did active politics locally’.⁴²⁰ As in the case of Kebele’s initial squatters, the German communards had a personal ‘need’ (living in a warm area after their retirement) they actualised in a political way.

The German libertarians initially teamed up with a group of liberal citizens more interested in founding a recreational club than a proper commune. In the meantime, Agostino and other Salento anarchists had scattered across Italy, and decided to form a Salento coordinating anarchist group to remain in touch. Such a group became immediately involved in antimilitarism, since Agostino had been incarcerated as a conscientious objector, but also because ‘Salento [became] the aircraft carrier of NATO in the Mediterranean’. After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the ‘eastern bloc’ that followed, the danger of a communist army invading Italy disappeared. Several military units and infrastructures moved from the north-eastern border with Yugoslavia to the Apulian peninsula, where they could better control the Mediterranean Sea. Reunited around the antimilitarist flag, the Salentini found out by chance about the Germans’ project for a libertarian commune, and decided to participate with the prospect of returning ‘home’ to apply anarchism to real life. Together, German and Italian libertarians undertook a three-year path of organisational seminars that slowly shaped Urupia. Without this common interest (Salento) on the part of the two groups, no Urupia would exist today. While Kebele activists were drawn to Bristol for its radical reputation, this appears to be less important in a rural setting. In fact, the German founders searched for a place that reflected the imaginary of sunny Italy, and the Italians exploited the chance to reunite and return to their ‘homeland’. In addition, Agostino admitted that a fundamental role was played by the well-known cheapness of the properties in the area – Salento did not become a tourist destination until the mid-1990s.⁴²¹ Finally, Apulia is the Italian region with the highest percentage of its territory dedicated to farming and has a long agricultural tradition.⁴²² It was this rural identity rather than any political history that attracted Agostino and his comrades.

4.3 Communards and the libertarian spaces

From the beginning, Urupia’s communards planned to create an ‘open commune’ – open to visitors and new members, but also open to active political intervention from the world beyond. Yet, at the beginning, all they could do, said Agostino, was refurbish the buildings and cultivate

⁴²⁰ Manni, Interview on Urupia.

⁴²¹ Manni.

⁴²² Giampaola Bellini and Fabio Lipizzi, eds., ‘Atlante Dell’agricoltura Italiana’ (Istituto Nazionale della Statistica, 2013), <http://www.istat.it/en/files/2014/03/Atlante-dellagricoltura-italiana.-6%C2%B0-Censimento-generale-dellagricoltura.pdf>.

the land. Later, the experience and the personal interests of its communards shaped both the internal spaces of Urupia and its relations with external radical spaces. A recent example is the opening (in September 2014) of a libertarian school within Urupia, which was proposed and strongly supported by Thea – one of the first people to join the commune after its foundation. This came into being because of Thea's personal interest in libertarian education, but also out of a collective need. Two children of the commune attended a local Steiner school, but following a disagreement with a teacher there, the parents living at Urupia pulled their children out – as did others. The foundation of another school at Urupia provided a solution to a collective problem.⁴²³ However, opening a community space depending on the commitment of a single communard – or a small group – can also have negative outcomes. This was the case with a carpenter's workshop that one of the initial communards – an expert carpenter – asked the community to open in the nearby village of San Marzano. His hope was to diversify the sources of income for Urupia. Yet, due to personal reasons, the carpenter communard had to abandon the community, thus causing the closure of the workshop and the loss of the community's investment.

From time to time, Urupia organises events like the *Festival delle terre* (Festival of the Lands, but also Festival of the Fields), which promote a political reflection on for example agriculture and education.⁴²⁴ Furthermore, Urupia's communards often participate in events organised by other communes or social centres or libertarian organisations, as one of their objectives is to be politically active by sharing practices and experiences. By doing so, they helped build an informal network of libertarian realities, and they are in fact one of the reference points within the Italian anarchist world. They managed to create a European network thanks to their organic products (olive oil and wine) that they sell only to individuals and like-minded groups. Nevertheless, as Agostino admitted, they have had problems with anarchists who reproached them for purchasing – rather than occupying – the property.⁴²⁵ Unlike urban social centres, a rural community like Urupia organises its internal spaces to meet internal needs, rather than to provide a service to the neighbourhood or to attract new activists. Something Urupia and social centres have in common, however, is the ability to construct radical networks both through activism and for economic purposes. They consider the sale of their products to be a political act as well as a way to sustain themselves, sending with each bottle a leaflet that outlines their political programme and activities.

4.4 Urupia's relation with the local residents

Thea once told me a short anecdote that indicates perfectly the relation between Urupia and its immediate neighbourhood. She said that one day a communard was working on the tractor.

⁴²³ Thea, Interview on Urupia; For more information on the libertarian school at Urupia: 'La Scuola a Urupia', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, Summer 2016, <http://www.arivista.org/?nr=409&pag=119.htm#5>.

⁴²⁴ For further details on the events organised at Urupia, see the commune's blog: 'Una Comune Libertaria Nel Salento', Urupia, accessed 18 September 2016, <https://urupia.wordpress.com/>.

⁴²⁵ Manni, Interview on Urupia.

Suddenly, from the close-by plot of land, a farmer appeared. The two had known each other for years, and the latter asked the comunard: ‘How long have you been here for?’, and the comunard answered: ‘It’s almost ten years, now’. ‘Good’, replied the man on the tractor, ‘you’ve almost done serving your time, then’. The farmer, Thea explained, had taken their comrade for a prisoner.⁴²⁶ Although amusing, this episode represents the difficulty that many libertarian communities faced – both in town and in the countryside – in reaching local non-activists. It might appear easier in a rural context, where face-to-face contact is perhaps easier to establish than in big cities. However, the dynamism of the city allows a social centre – like Kebele – to by-pass a non-receptive neighbourhood, and thrive anyway thanks to the involvement of activists from nearby areas. This is harder in a rural setting, where – especially in southern Italy – there is widespread social and political conservatism. The number of people with whom a community can come into contact is limited, and the lack of infrastructures and public services hinders movement. Urupia has thrived anyway, becoming a key reference point for contemporary Italian libertarians – its fame attracts radicals from the whole of Italy and abroad. The cases of Kebele and Urupia show therefore that measuring the ‘success’ of a libertarian community only by their interaction with the local community is misleading. Even though communities like Kebele openly state that as one of their main objectives, their function is to provide an entry point into radical politics for a wider group of people who are already looking, and a reliable hub for radical networks – a place to meet, plan, socialise, discuss ideas. Similarly, Urupia offers a space to practice anarchism in everyday life and to meet like-minded people. Without such spaces, it would be very difficult to form the personal connections which continue to be a central part of anarchist activism.

5. Libertarian communities as processes?

Like Doreen Massey’s well-known description of Kilburn, in which she highlights the many links between local places and the world, my visits to Ex-Caserma, Kebele and Urupia revealed the presence of multi-layered connections between each place and wider radical networks spanning time and space.⁴²⁷ Through direct and indirect (sub)cultural and social interactions, the people involved in such experiences absorbed radical references and brought them back to their community in different forms. At Ex-Caserma, for instance, the community paid homage to activists and movements of various periods and countries by adopting their images and slogans – from American radicals to 1970s anti-fascists, and even 1930s Spanish revolutionaries. In addition, they had dedicated their social library to Pavlos Fyssas, and used a room to host the so-called Clown Army. Francesco explained that Pavlos was a Greek anti-fascist rapper killed by a member of the neo-nazi party Golden Dawn in 2013, while the Clown Army originated in Britain

⁴²⁶ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

⁴²⁷ Doreen Massey, ‘Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place’, in *Mapping the Futures. Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird et al. (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 64, 65.

in the early 2000s as a group of activists using direct action and non-violent tactics to oppose globalisation and militarism in particular.⁴²⁸

All these names, symbols, slogans, are part of a radical collective imagination; and activists draw from and contribute to this by maintaining relations with other radical communities. The activists with more experience and those who have visited other communities transmit their knowledge to the group. Some are resistant to this process, however. Gennaro explained how he had participated in the mid-1990s in the Barese social centre of Fucine Meridionali (1994-95), but lamented that every time he tried to inspire or warn his younger comrades by speaking of his experience at Fucine, they answered in a mocking tone: 'Things have changed since your time'. He also mentioned the existence, in the mid-1990s, of an electronic communication method called BBS that allowed file sharing and messaging. It was the beginning of militant net-activism. According to Gennaro, this was instrumental in Fucine's 'ability to have influence on everything that happened in town', but also in sharing information and good practice.⁴²⁹

Nowadays, activists keep using electronic means to communicate and reach as many people as possible. Both Kebele and Urupia have a website, and Ex-Caserma has a Facebook profile.⁴³⁰ The testimony of Tony, a member of Ex-Caserma, showed however that activists still prefer face-to-face interaction for memory transmission and sharing good practices. This is probably also to reduce the risks of infiltration. Rather than an inter-generational process, he explained that knowledge was exchanged between peers. He said that at Ex-Caserma most activists had a social centre or a 'topic' they were most interested in, and followed it trying to 'get influenced as much as possible'. Then, whenever some interesting meeting or event happened in a social centre or elsewhere, a couple of people – usually the 'expert' and a 'newbie' – went there to participate. When they returned, they would refer back to the assembly.⁴³¹ Similarly, if somebody had a specific interest and some expertise, they were able to propose a film screening or a workshop or another initiative to spread their interest and reach other people. This is what some anarchist activists of Ex-Caserma attempted to do by showing an antispecist documentary, which started a lively debate within Ex-Caserma on veganism as both an ethical and a political choice.⁴³²

The members of Kebele have been particularly active in trying to relaunch the UK Social Centres Network, which had the goal of connecting autonomous spaces around the United Kingdom. Michael and other Kebele activists have also held seminars on the necessity of relaunching this network, and have promoted it by hosting a series of meetings with activists from

⁴²⁸ Francesco and Ruggiero, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata; For more information regarding the Clown Army: Paul Routledge, 'Sensuous Solidarities: Emotion, Politics and Performance in the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army', *Antipode* 44, no. 2 (2012): 428–52.

⁴²⁹ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

⁴³⁰ 'Ex Caserma Liberata', Facebook, accessed 20 March 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Excasermaliberata>; Kebele Community Co-Op, accessed 8 October 2017, <https://network23.org/kebele2/>; 'Una Comune Libertaria Nel Salento'.

⁴³¹ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

⁴³² Gianni, Sid, and Veganauro, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata, 18 August 2014.

other social centres.⁴³³ Alessio Lunghi, the co-founder of several Italian-style social centres in early-2000s London, stated that this network had already been launched in those years. However, he explained that social centres had already a high workload to deal with, and wider networking was sometimes neglected as a result.⁴³⁴ The importance that Urupia gives to sharing practices is confirmed by their decision to offer their place and their expertise for free to whomever intends to start a libertarian commune. A group of anarcho-communists from Cingia de' Botti, near Cremona (Lombardy), took the opportunity by attending a series of seminars at Urupia, and also living there for a while.⁴³⁵ Then, they returned to northern Italy and established their own community: Le Cingiallegre.⁴³⁶ Thus, be they in the countryside or in the city, in Britain or in Italy, these libertarian communities have valued the sharing of experiences and ideas. They strive for the construction of a radical network, at least local, sometimes transnational, but activists/communards are generally so busy that such networks are often neglected.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at interactions between the three basic 'components' that constitute every libertarian community: place, space, and people. I have shown how these elements can combine to produce different effects on the communities. In her *Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place*, Doreen Massey first explained that interactions are processes and, as such, can vary depending on various factors. She demonstrated that interactions and place are both processes. Thus, a change in the network of social interactions that animate a libertarian space can modify the space itself.⁴³⁷ An example is the closure of the carpenter's workshop at Urupia after the only carpenter communard abandoned the community. This chapter has added grist to Massey's argument and also extends it: I argue that libertarian communities as a whole are processes too – including both the social interactions and the places/spaces that constitute them. They can survive both transformations of their patterns of interaction and a change of place. If a core of activists remains cohesive, the community can even survive an eviction, as in the case of another Barese social centre – Villa Roth. After the eviction of the Villa Roth social centre, its activists joined forces with other groups and occupied what then became Ex-Caserma. Nonetheless, Villa Roth's legacy survives within Ex-Caserma in the form of its activists' expertise, as well as in some objects (books, pieces of furniture), activities (social garden, social library), and even name of places (Pavlos Fyssas). In the following chapter I will further explore the ways in which libertarians have been remembering and interpreting their past, and more in general perceiving 'time'.

⁴³³ Michael, Interview on Kebele.

⁴³⁴ Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London.

⁴³⁵ Manni, Interview on Urupia.

⁴³⁶ 'Autonomia Produttiva E Vita Comunitaria', *A-Rivista Anarchica*, Summer 2015, <http://www.arivista.org/index.php?nr=400&pag=87.htm&key=cingiallegre>.

⁴³⁷ Massey, 'Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place', 59–69.

Chapter Three

The time and memory of libertarians

Peter Osborne described the historical role of capitalism as one which ‘established systematic relations of social interdependence on a planetary scale ... producing a single global space of temporal co-existence or coevalness’. Thus, ‘Capitalism has “universalized” history’. This process towards synchronisation, added Osborne, started with the capitalist substitution of ‘natural time’ – the rhythms of agrarian life – with ‘the time of the clock’. It was later perfected with the development of transport and communications while capitalism became a global system.⁴³⁸ Capitalism produced a new perception of time, in which time became an ‘abstract exchange value that allows work to be translated into money [and] to calculate efficiency and profit’.⁴³⁹ In modern Western society, despite the existence of different senses of time – such as cyclical time, family time, industrial time – David Harvey still describes time as essentially defined through the organisation of social practices for the production of commodities.⁴⁴⁰

Judith Halberstam criticised the absence, in Harvey’s work, of the possibility that people would choose to live outside of reproductive and familial time, or on the edges of mainstream labour and production systems. She called such people – like ‘ravers, clubs kids ... sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers and the unemployed’ – ‘queer subjects’. Their queerness consists in being oppositional to the ‘norms’ imposed by the dominant culture, which reacts by phobically displacing them onto the figure of the queer – the ‘odd-one-out’.⁴⁴¹ Queer subjects, theorised Halberstam, experienced temporality in a different fashion. This kind of temporality she described as ‘queer time’. Halberstam saw queer time emerging within late-twentieth century gay communities, when the AIDS epidemic had reduced the hope of a future for some and created a new emphasis on the present. She also related it to gay liberationist refusals of bourgeois temporal frames like reproduction and family.⁴⁴² Starting from Halberstam’s idea of a queer time, I want to look at another group of ‘queer subjects’ choosing to live outside or on the edge of mainstream social and production systems – communitarian libertarians. Additionally, I will draw on Robert H. Lauer’s definition of a ‘social time’ based on the works of Henri Bergson and Philip Bock: ‘Time is not something that exists independently of human life ... but is something that is always socially constructed’.⁴⁴³

Through further close analysis of my case study communities, I theorise in this chapter the existence of a ‘libertarian time’ and a ‘libertarian memory’. The former is a ‘time’ that

⁴³⁸ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time* (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 34.

⁴³⁹ Barbara Adam, ‘When Time Is Money: Contested Rationalities of Time in the Theory and Practice of Work’, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 102 (December 2003): 97.

⁴⁴⁰ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden: Blackwell, 1990), 202, 239.

⁴⁴¹ Lee Edelman, ‘The Future Is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive’, *Narrative* 6, no. 1 (1998): 27.

⁴⁴² Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York, London: New York University Press, 2005), 10, 2, 6.

⁴⁴³ Robert H. Lauer, *Temporal Man: The Meaning and Uses of Social Time* (New York: Praeger, 1981), vii.

libertarians create by interacting within their communities and with the mainstream, while the latter is a set of theories and practices that libertarians developed to subvert the mainstream. My tripartite analysis will first look at the formation of ‘libertarian time’ in the daily life of libertarian communities; then, at ‘libertarian time’ in relation to the life cycle; and finally, at the effect of ‘libertarian time’ in the transmission of inter-generational memory. In this last part, I will expand my investigation of memory within libertarian communities that I started in the previous chapter, when I focused on the relationship between place/space and radical memories. Throughout the chapter, I will compare and contrast experiences spanning almost fifty years – with particular attention to the city of Bari alongside references to other Italian and British case studies.

1. A day in the life of libertarians

By visiting libertarian communities, and talking with people currently and previously involved in such groups, I noticed that libertarians often developed a divergent attitude towards ‘time’. For example, people generally try to be punctual at meetings or events, and to optimise time when making a decision or reaching an agreement. In libertarian communities it was usually the opposite.

1.1 Waiting for Godot: The ‘absurd’ forgetfulness and lateness of libertarians

There are many things that can go wrong when attempting to interview a radical activist – especially when you are not a trusted member of their community. The first and most obvious is that the activist can simply refuse to be interviewed, which happened several times. Sometimes, though, the activist would agree to being interviewed, and then forget to turn up. This happened twice while trying to interview people from Kebele social centre in Bristol. Once, I simply found the social centre closed, and had to return to London – although the interviewee then kindly agreed to be interviewed via Skype to spare me a further day-trip. The second time, another interviewee had forgotten about our appointment, but Kebele was open for their weekly bike workshop, and she was busy repairing her bicycle – she agreed to answer my questions while she moved around fixing brakes and greasing chains. Other times, the interviewees would remember the interview and show up, but would be late. At Urupia commune, in southern Apulia, I arrived – as requested – in the late afternoon. Yet, the main farmstead was completely deserted – with the exception of one teenage girl preparing the communal dinner in the kitchen. The rest of the communards were busy in the fields. Similarly, at Ex-Caserma Liberata social centre in Bari, I once arrived in the late morning to interview an activist. Again, nobody was around except one person who informed me that my interviewee would probably not show up, as they had had an ‘all-nighter’ the night before. This was indeed the case.

A similar tendency towards lateness affected all events and meetings I took part in within existing libertarian spaces. One night, I went to Ex-Caserma for a theatre performance by the radical Greek company Tsiritsantsoules. When, after a half hour wait, I asked an activist about

the reason for the delay, he explained that it was totally normal – in fact, he said, they advertised all their events using a starting time of at least forty-five minutes to one hour ahead of the actual starting time. This was evidently a well-known habit for both activists and frequenters, as nobody complained about the delay, and only after a one-hour wait had most of the audience arrived. I observed the same attitude in British libertarian spaces, although their margin of mutually-accepted lateness was usually about half an hour. A difference that indicates how each libertarian community acts within and reacts to a pre-existent dominant cultural framework. As I have lived in both southern Italy and England, I have found lateness to be more common and tolerated in the former. Nevertheless, I had the impression that in both cases the libertarians intended to enact a more relaxed time to that of capitalism, the time of work. Rather than being a waste of time, the time before a meeting or event becomes a further occasion to socialise and enjoy idleness, as well as to radicalise visitors by showing them around and explaining what the space was about.

My experience as interviewer made me realise that libertarians were much less forgetful and late outside their communities. Whenever the agreed-on meeting location was a café or the interviewee's house, I encountered no problems. They seemed to break with social conventions inside radical spaces, but respect them outside – it appeared to me they had a double standard of time. However, age and profession were also an important factor in this, as these people were mostly former activists, or people who had become more 'integrated' into wider society. Evidently, having a nine-to-five job and children to take to school had reset their perception of and interaction with 'time'.

1.2 The NeverEnding meeting: Democracy over time-efficiency

Besides starting well after the publicised time, meetings and events also tended to last for hours. The main reason behind the length of many libertarian meetings lies in their decision-making method: consensus. This involves debating until all participants agree, or – at least – do not exercise their veto. During one of my visits at Ex-Caserma, I was invited to participate in the weekly assembly of the Clown Army, which functioned as an independent collective within Ex-Caserma. Although they had an agenda for the meeting, there was no scheduled finish time, so the debates went on until people found an agreement. Some communities, like Kebele social centre, adopted some form of structure to limit the length of assemblies.⁴⁴⁴ During an open day there, one of the more experienced members of the social centre explained that they tended to nominate a member to act as a 'chair' for the assembly – possibly taking turns. The chair would have the role of moderator to make sure that everybody had a fair chance to take part in the discussion, and that the discussion remained focused on the agenda items. This, according to her, helped Kebele have more effective assemblies. A debate aiming at consensus is nevertheless usually particularly time-consuming, and can cause frictions within the group or collective. An

⁴⁴⁴ For an overview of the Kebele's internal organisation and daily practices, see also: Nathan Eisenstadt, 'The Ethos of Autonomous Space: Paradoxical Experiments in Everyday Liberation' (Bristol, 2013), 37–42.

example of this is occurred at Urupia, where the community split on the proposal of purchasing solar panels. Even though this would have helped Urupia become more independent from the national grid, some members had political reservations regarding the idea of applying for a mortgage. This led to stalemate that lasted for more than a year, until they gave the project the green light. Urupia communitarian Thea explained that:

The instrument of consensus is a complex, articulated instrument because it lengthens the process, but it's important because it gives everybody a space to express themselves. If this then means that the need to find an agreement makes everyone listen to the others, and to reconsider their own position, that's a positive outcome, in my opinion. ... If I speak with you, you can surely make me see things I couldn't see before – and this is incredibly enriching. If we speak of majority/minority, on the other hand, this possibility decreases a lot.⁴⁴⁵

Thea here showed that libertarians that choose to decide by consensus are aware that the price to pay for this is 'time'. Nonetheless, they are willing to pay this price in order to have what they see as a more democratic and fair decision-making process.

This concept can sound nonsensical to people born and raised within a society that has a capitalist conception of time. A society in which productivity is more valuable than democracy. When Ex-Caserma opened its assemblies to local residents, Barese activist Carmen remembered that: 'There were some who freaked out when they found out we didn't make decisions by voting but by consensual decisions. They told us: "Why don't you hurry up? Let's just vote and get over with it – so we finish earlier"'.⁴⁴⁶ Carmen's recollection shows one aspect of the different attitude 'ordinary' people and libertarians can have towards time. She added, though, that consensus 'can be tiresome' for libertarians too – as Urupia's example demonstrated. Libertarians are generally born and raised within a society that has a capitalist conception of time, therefore they have to train themselves in the first place to accept time-consuming methods. To help with this, libertarian networks such as Radical Routes have been producing publications on the subject.⁴⁴⁷ Additionally, many communities – like Kebele and Urupia – organise training days for their own members, as well as for people who want to create other libertarian spaces. They argue that consensus decision-making can in fact be the most efficient method for a libertarian community. Bearing in mind that people living in a community give their labour and energy freely, commitment is a crucial resource. Whenever people feel alienated from a decision, they are less likely to freely give their time and energy to carry out the work and tasks if decided by a majority, but needing to be enacted by everyone. In addition, libertarian communities generally have no mechanisms for forcing people to carry out tasks they do not agree with. From this point of view,

⁴⁴⁵ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁴⁶ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

⁴⁴⁷ 'Radical Routes - Publications & Resources', Radical Routes, 2016, <http://radicalroutes.org.uk/publications-and-resources.html>.

the time libertarians spend discussing and deciding by consensus appears more ‘invested’ than ‘wasted’.

1.3 The role of ‘spontaneism’ and ‘seniority’ in decision-making

Consensus-based decision making is now widespread within the libertarian movement. However, in the past, decisions followed a less structured approach, although not necessarily a more rapid one. Most interviewees involved in libertarian squats and neighbourhood committees in the late 1960s and 1970s confirmed that they would usually strive to find a shared opinion on important matters. Then, they would vote. An interesting contribution came from Silvana Donno of the mid-1970s San Pasquale neighbourhood committee in Bari. She explained that they ‘decided by majority, in theory – even though then the minority would do whatever they wanted. Usually, you participated in things you agreed on’.⁴⁴⁸ With this statement, Silvana indirectly confirmed the importance of shared, consensual decisions in libertarian communities. Besides being a further attack on the efficiency of the surrounding capitalist world, this habit reveals a widespread attitude among libertarians: ‘spontaneism’ – the tendency to act as a consequence of momentum. Ian Dixon recalled the spontaneity behind the name of his 1960s urban commune in west London: ‘We were painting the flat one day, and a French anarchist came and said: “What should we call this place?”; and we said: “Well, there is a white wall – oh yes, the Whitehall community!” [laughs]. This was the way things happened – very *ad hoc*, and sometimes it was even a joke’.⁴⁴⁹ Josefine Speyer, who lived in another west London community (Frestonia, occupied in 1977), confirmed that decisions ‘just sort of happened ... Somebody took an initiative [and others jumped in]’.⁴⁵⁰ This tradition continued through recent squatting experiences. Carolyn said that in Claremont Road, during the early-1990s ‘No M11’ campaign in east London, ‘one person would start and say: “Right, I’m gonna start and barricading there. Who wants to help me?”. Somebody’d walk pass and say: “That looks really good – [I] am gonna do that”’.⁴⁵¹

When interminable debates and voting gave way to momentum, charisma and timing became fundamental. Carolyn described Claremont Road as an extremely fluid situation, where ‘decisions were often made by whoever was at the meeting, or whoever was actually at the place where the action was happening that particular day ... people were dropping in, and leaving, and dropping out – it was ever changing’.⁴⁵² Need made actions necessary. In that context where eviction was imminent, a person saying ‘I’m gonna start barricading there’ had a mobilising effect. Its mobilising effect increased exponentially when the person was also a ‘charismatic leader’. This what happened at Frestonia, according to Josefine: ‘When we were threatened with eviction by the GLC, we declared independence ‘cause we’d been to Christiania – cause Nicholas

⁴⁴⁸ Silvana Donno, ‘Domanda OAP/ORA’, 12 June 2015.

⁴⁴⁹ Ian Dixon, Interview on squatting in London, 14 February 2016.

⁴⁵⁰ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁵¹ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁴⁵² Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part one).

Saunders ... had friends in Christiania'.⁴⁵³ Then, she added: 'When we came back, Nicholas Saunders said: "We should declare independence". And we did'. Nicholas Saunders was an influential protagonist of the 1970s London counterculture.⁴⁵⁴

In addition to charisma and timing, Carolyn mentioned another factor that played an important role in the decision-making process: 'seniority'. She claimed that: 'Any house that was occupied by a person who'd been there for a long time – it was their decision to make over that particular house', and that: 'If you spent a lot of time there, people'd have more respect for your opinion'.⁴⁵⁵ This is particularly evident in spaces where external contingences modified the usual perception of time, like a place under the threat of eviction – where the situation is fluid and 'ever changing', with people 'dropping in, and leaving, and dropping out'. There, more experienced people are often reference points for the community, carrying its history and traditions. Similarly, also people dedicating a lot of their time to community issues often become central to decision making. Agostino Manni – one of the founders of Urupia – confirmed this, though also identified it as 'the real cause of all our arguments'. He explained: 'I work for ten hours, and you work for eight or five or two; I spend time trying to sort out all the shit that happens in here, and you – more often than not – delegate to me, as I'm more inclined to do this'.⁴⁵⁶

What emerges here is that, in a society where majority voting does not exist or is not strictly binding, various aspects of time rose to become key elements in the decision-making process shaping the society itself. Where – especially in squats and occupied social centres – eviction threats and fluidity were the norm, a sense of urgency unites the community, and guides it towards action. Important factors influencing the decisions are also charisma, experience and commitment of the communards. People with these characteristics can easily become 'informal leaders'. With regards to this, some interviewees mentioned Jo Freeman's 'tyranny of structurelessness' and Étienne de La Boétie's 'voluntary servitude'. Freeman theorised the former in the early 1970s when she participated in Women Liberation Movement groups, whose leaderless and structureless organisational forms often hid informal structures.⁴⁵⁷ De La Boétie's sixteenth century essay argued that dictators – in this case people with formal or informal decisional power – only exercised their power because their subjects (or fellow libertarians) allowed them.⁴⁵⁸ References to authors such as Freeman and de La Boétie show that

⁴⁵³ Christiania is a self-proclaimed autonomous anarchist district in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark. It was an abandoned military citadel that squatters occupied and proclaimed a 'free town' in 1971.

⁴⁵⁴ One of his most famous publications was: Nicholas Saunders, *Alternative London* (London: Wildwood House, 1977).

⁴⁵⁵ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁴⁵⁶ Manni, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁵⁷ Jo Freeman, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', *Berkley Journal of Sociology* 17 (73 1972): 151–64.

⁴⁵⁸ Étienne de La Boétie, *De La Servitude Volontaire* (Genève: Droz, 1987). See also: Chris Land, 'Flying the Black Flag: Revolt, Revolution and the Social Organization of Piracy in the "Golden Age"', *Management & Organizational History* 2, no. 2 (2007): 169–92.

libertarians/anarchists were aware of the limits of consensus-based decision making and actively involved in collective processes of critical reflection to find and experiment alternatives.⁴⁵⁹

1.4 Perception of time between precariousness and stability

Though always important, ‘time’ had a different value in different communities. We see this in the case of squats, where the high turnover makes long-term residents particularly valuable and influential. Something similar happens in social centres, where activists come and go in waves. Talking of her experience within south London social centre 121, Carolyn said:

There were definitely times when suddenly there would be new bursts of enthusiasm and energy for a particular thing, and then times when that energy would disappear. Maybe it was the people involved who’d disappear – off to travel because they were part of a punk band or some travelling group, or they were off to a gathering somewhere. Then, things would change.⁴⁶⁰

All this transmitted a sense of precariousness and insecurity to such spaces. Another aspect of this precariousness was the uncertainty that existed in places like Claremont Road, where Carolyn and her comrades ‘already knew that [the cancellation of the road] was probably not gonna happen, ‘cause much had already been invested, the works had already started – the forces that wanted that road to be built were stronger than ours’.⁴⁶¹ In cases like Claremont Road, what was uncertain was not if they would be evicted, but when. On the one hand this state of uncertainty prevented many people from fully investing their time and effort in a temporary project but, on the other hand, it often allowed a flourishing of creativity in those spaces, as – to quote Josefine (and Plato) – ‘necessity is the mother of invention’.⁴⁶²

Despite being precarious, squatters like John – a long-term squatter in London, now in his late 60s – ‘just thought this was an appropriate way of living’.⁴⁶³ Others, Josefine claimed, saw it as a phase in their lives – especially ‘people aiming to have a career’. However, she said: ‘I didn’t think at the time [at my lifestyle] as temporary ... I wasn’t thinking “I’m gonna be here just temporarily”’. They would not worry either about long-term strategies: ‘We were not thinking “Where we go next?” – something would happen. You don’t know what the next project is, but it will be a good one [laughs]. That’s how we lived’.⁴⁶⁴ Besides the objectively precarious situation of these communities, Josefine’s memories call into question other elements that have an effect on the perception of time, such as the wider social context and the age of the people involved – which I will consider in the next sections.

⁴⁵⁹ For further perspectives on organisation in libertarian/anarchist spaces, see: Martin Parker et al., ‘The Question of Organization: A Manifesto for Alternatives’, *Ephemera* 14, no. 4 (2014): 623–38.

⁴⁶⁰ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁴⁶¹ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part one).

⁴⁶² Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁶³ John, Interview on squatting in London, 10 February 2016.

⁴⁶⁴ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

Conversely, the stability of a non-squatted space like Urupia – founded in 1995, and still fully operational – has the opposite effect on the way in which its activists/communards process the idea of their own time. They tend to have plans for their community. Agostino, for instance, said:

We still have seminars: full-immersion events – the commune stops for two, three days. We ask some trusted guest to deal with the ordinary management: the kids that need to go to school, the cooking ... and we discuss our economy, political reasons, conflicts, social management. We do this when we feel the need – nowadays, once a year.⁴⁶⁵

Their perception of time became radically different compared to that of squatters and activists in occupied social centres. While Carolyn defined as people ‘who’d been there for a long time’ those who had been living at Claremont Road for several months or even a few years, Urupia’s communist Vito stated in his interview that ‘maybe after twenty years is still too early to attempt an analysis’ of the commune.⁴⁶⁶

In the same way, Shelley Assiter and the other Frestonia squatters changed their attitude towards future when in 1978 they established a housing co-op and then found an agreement with the Notting Hill Housing Trust. The trust agreed to build a purpose-built housing for the former squatters following what Shelley called ‘the Golden List – exactly what our needs were ... We asked for a communal garden, and we got that ... We asked for a community hall ... they never gave us that ... [But] we’ve got control over the allocation [of the flats]’. Rather than not thinking what the next project would be, the Frestonian ‘had to become accountable and serious about things. We’ve got policies about everything’.⁴⁶⁷ Not only did former Frestonians abandoned the uncertainty of a squat for the certainty of a housing co-op, but they also abandoned spontaneity for a more structured community.

2. No community for ‘old’ people

Be it due to precariousness or thanks to stability, libertarians developed a concept of ‘time’ alternative to that of mainstream society. Another Frestonian – Jude – remembered: ‘There was this idea about “straight society” and “not-straight society”’.⁴⁶⁸ Within the ‘not-straight society’, the idea of ‘time’ as an extremely precious thing was widespread, as opposed to the capitalist model that considers time as currency within the framework of productivity.⁴⁶⁹ Libertarian time was thus in opposition to the mainstream, and sometimes it openly challenged the mainstream and its institutions. Before founding Urupia, Agostino and other comrades of his were involved in the *SenzaPatria* (WithoutHomeland) anti-militarist newspaper. Following a long anarchist

⁴⁶⁵ Manni, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁶⁶ Vito, Interview on Urupia, 1 April 2016.

⁴⁶⁷ Assiter, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁶⁸ Jude, Interview on squatting in London, 25 February 2016.

⁴⁶⁹ E. P. Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, no. 38 (December 1967): 87.

tradition, Agostino refused conscription – compulsory at the time – and faced over a year of military prison.⁴⁷⁰ This, according to his partner Thea, reflected the opinion anarchists held that ‘the state has no right to deprive you of a year of your own life’.⁴⁷¹

2.1 A time for fun, a time to struggle

All the London-based interviewees described their time as squatters in the 1970s as a particularly enjoyable period in their lives. Mary Finnigan spoke of ‘some very entertaining things happening – a lot of good fun and many parties. I had a wonderful time’.⁴⁷² Josefina Speyer remembers: ‘People smoked dope, took magic mushrooms, they’d go to festivals, play music, organise events ... It was a playground, really, in some way. An enormous playground. But serious play to think about serious things, and worry about a better future’. A future in which – continued Josefina: ‘We wanted to change mainstream society in a more communal and less materialistic way’.⁴⁷³ By taking drugs, playing and listening to music, and simply having fun, Josefina and her friends refused the capitalist model of time, and instead took back ownership of their own time. Although many squatters had the possibility to live in that way because they were ‘on the dole’, thus benefiting from others’ subservience to capitalist time. Many hoped nonetheless to ‘change mainstream society’ by setting the example of a society based on collective sharing and personal enjoyment.

The same elements appeared in John’s description of his years as a squatter in 1970s London: ‘The people that I knew ... are not hard-edge politicians, these were people rather keen on having a good time: sex, drugs and rock n roll’.⁴⁷⁴ There was a difference, then, between people like the Frestonians and what John called ‘hard-edge politicians’. This is especially evident in the interview I did with Nicola Laucelli. Nicola is a former militant of the anarchist organisation OAP/ORA and member of the Barese San Pasquale neighbourhood committee. When I asked him about the reasons behind the demise of both organisations, he said:

We were torn to pieces by *lottarmatismo* [the trend among Leftists to enter or support armed struggle groups], so people sought refuge in ‘the ephemeral’: they got high with smoke ... and heroin had already appeared. Before *lottarmatismo*, you never heard comrades say ‘Let’s go dancing’. In that period the detachment from ‘the political’ happened – we went towards ‘the ephemeral’, towards hedonism. We started hearing that people went dancing – but it was unconceivable before then: We stayed together, in somebody’s house. Then, discos started to appear, and you saw the transformation – because people ran away from ‘the political’.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁰ Manni, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁷¹ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁷² Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London.

⁴⁷³ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁷⁴ John, Interview on squatting in London.

⁴⁷⁵ Laucelli, Interview on OAP-ORA.

Nicola was a ‘hard-edge politico’ – life for him was no playground, but a struggle. In fact, OAP/ORA was even publicly against the use of drugs, as they distracted the militants from their revolutionary objective. Their time was nevertheless also in opposition to mainstream/capitalist time – they gave importance to socialisation and strove to embody the principles of anarchism in their daily lives:

At that time, we started discussing about the contrast between ‘personal’ and ‘political’. We used to say: ‘We must do the anarchy or live the anarchy?’. It was feminism that brought this theme within the movement; meaning that you had to have a coherent behaviour in your private life. At that time, we tried to stay together. It was different from today: you went to live with your comrades, you tried to free yourself from your family, and live like in a commune. Yet, some comrades lived their lives in a way that was not coherent with the anarchist-communist principles.⁴⁷⁶

In a letter to his own organisation, he denounced these latter ‘comrades’ because, in the words of the day, ‘this type of militancy denoted a tendency to individualism, therefore to a non-coherently anarchist-communist praxis’. Like Josefine, Nicola wanted to ‘change mainstream society in a more communal and less materialistic way’ by setting the example – although Nicola’s example did not include drugs.

In any case, this preference for a ‘communal time’ over an ‘individualistic time’ remained at the centre of libertarian communities well into the 1990s. In those years, Bibi squatted in the north of London with many young people: ‘A lot of them weren’t from London but from up north: from Scotland, Ireland – an awful lot of people from Ireland who were just having fun, away from their parents’. In addition, she claimed, squatting ‘provided an alternative to ... [people] being separated into their separate little flats in the city where you have to pay rent, pay bills, work all the time, never have any time to do what you want to do in your social life, and also very much living in an individualistic way’.⁴⁷⁷ According to experienced Ex-Caserma activist Gennaro, this has changed in the more recent years, as he noticed a more individualistic approach among the younger activists, who ‘nowadays speak using the singular form: “*I* think that-”’.⁴⁷⁸ Indeed, several members of Ex-Caserma identified with the individualistic current of the anarchist movement. This attitude however transcends anarchist currents – it reflects the broader trend in wider society towards individualisation, and thus confirms once again the pervasiveness of mainstream ideas. Overall, two transversal attitudes characterise the libertarians’ broad perception of time. The first is the tendency to use time more as an occasion to have fun or to struggle depending on their political formation. Hippies and lifestyle squatters leaned more towards the former, while ‘hard-edge politicos’ towards the latter. This division was also geographical, as squatting and hippie movements were more widespread in Britain than in Italy. In addition,

⁴⁷⁶ Laucelli.

⁴⁷⁷ Bibi, Interview on squatting in London.

⁴⁷⁸ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

libertarians have gradually moved from a preference for sharing and spending time communally to a more individualistic way of life – a trait that reflects a mainstream tendency.

2.2 Work time

Life in a libertarian community is not only ‘sex, drugs and rock n roll’, as John described the lifestyle of his friends in the 1970s. In fact, Carmen explained that at Ex-Caserma, ‘if we leave for a moment, we find the day after that the mob have sold the place. We can’t afford to take even a day off!’.⁴⁷⁹ As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, libertarian spaces have always been particularly time-consuming to run. This is due to the amount of work that is necessary both to manage the place, and to organise all the various political activities and social events. However, in squatted areas – like Frestonia – the required commitment is lighter. Josefine noted that: ‘If you don’t have pressures to have money to pay the rent, then you can have time and energy to develop your work. So you will be able to do your work and get employment or set your own business – and that’s what many people did’.⁴⁸⁰ At the other extreme was the rural commune – the most time-consuming of the libertarian communities. Although rural communes have generally fewer social and political events to organise than social centres, they require an all-year-round commitment due to the agricultural activity. Vito explained that at Urupia: ‘We’re always connected to the land. If you say: “I want to go on holiday in March or April”, I say: “You’re crazy, because March and April and the most important months for our plants and trees. You have no idea where you’ve come to live”’.⁴⁸¹ Vito decided to renounce his life as a full-time artist to join Urupia:

I lived in a *trullo* in Ceglie for a year. There, we had a very relaxed life: I was an artist – did theatre workshops with kids. We ate, drank and made do with what we had. At the end of the day, though, I looked back and said: ‘What did I build today?’ ... I wanted to build something that would satisfy me, that would inspire people to change this shitty world ... Clearly, we made a very complex decision by coming here, because here you never stop working – the opposite of what I did that year, when I worked very little and had a lot of free time. Here you never finish.⁴⁸²

Both Vito and Josefine believed that their life choice would inspire people to change mainstream society. However, unlike Frestonia’s partying environment, Vito’s alternative society involved non-stop work – but also a more viable model, as communards relied much less on the external world. Thea clarified that work time at Urupia went beyond the work in the fields:

If you count the hours of productive labour, they’re few ... but it’s also true that our mind is never free ... even [our meetings] are yet another commitment. I’m happy to do this, but this might mean not being able to spend time with your daughter ... Meetings can be

⁴⁷⁹ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

⁴⁸⁰ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁸¹ Vito, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁸² Vito.

exhausting, sometimes you just say: ‘Why the fuck am I doing this? I’d rather clear the soil of stone – barehanded’. Then, at night, we have dinner together. So, if there’s a newly arrived guest asking questions, maybe I don’t feel like answering ... because I’m tired.⁴⁸³

Thea here mentioned ‘productive labour’ to speak of the work communards do in the fields, as well as producing wine and olive oil. Following a growing tendency within the feminist and libertarian movement, they differentiated between ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive labour’ – traditionally unpaid activities in the home, such as cleaning and cooking.⁴⁸⁴ She proudly stated that they ‘value both in the same way’ at Urupia.⁴⁸⁵ This awareness helped maintain a balance within the community – avoiding an excessive workload for the women of the community, who are traditionally the people in charge of ‘reproductive labour’.

As opposed to the relentless life of rural communes like Urupia, Josefine described the busy but pleasant life she had at Frestonia, where:

It was about living very cheaply, so that we had enough time to do the things that we wanted – which for me was painting and pottery, and for [my husband] writing ... and it takes quite a lot of energy to get a community organised with meetings. Having a small baby, we had our own private crèche, a communal garden. There was so much to do! [laughs]. Life was full-on in a very nice, pleasant way – we had plenty of time to hang out with each other. Whereas, nowadays, my son and his wife both work ... the children are sent away all day to nursery and school; they all come home in the evening exhausted. It’s just exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion! That was not how we lived at that time. It was much different: it was better.⁴⁸⁶

Not all activists/communards can produce art – and those who can, can rarely live on it. In addition, socio-political conditions can change and make certain choices harder to undertake, as in the case of the ongoing reduction of social benefits in Britain since the early 1980s. Alessio was born in 1977 on the outskirts of Rome but grew up in London from the age of three. He is now a self-taught web developer, and said:

Predominantly, [our group] was [working-class], but then people dropped out. ... a lot of people were at the time living on benefits. You could live on the dole. You’d have access to housing benefit and other state benefits. Out of thirty people in our collective, maybe one or two people worked, which now is rare: everyone has to work and do shit jobs and stuff. A lot, [after] being active for ten/fifteen years, were faced with the choice of getting a job, which was a job just for money, or go back into education. And these people are now in their thirties, with now kids and stuff, so some people went into education and did PhDs and are now teaching in universities, so that changed the class dynamic in some respects. It doesn’t diminish their experiences, but it does change the class dynamic.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸³ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁸⁴ For more information, see the article on Reproductive Labor in: Vicki Smith, *Sociology of Work: An Encyclopedia* (Los Angeles: SAGE Reference, 2013).

⁴⁸⁵ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁸⁶ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁸⁷ Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London.

In Italy – and in Britain too after the tightening up of the state benefit system – libertarians usually searched for jobs within the mainstream/capitalist world once they finished school or university. This is one of the two main causes for libertarians to drop out – together with starting a family. Luciano Sepe and Pina Buttiglione were in a relationship at the time of their involvement within the OAP/ORA and San Pasquale neighbourhood committee. Luciano said:

When we all entered the world of work, many gave out – me first. We – my wife and I – gave out when we started a business ... We were the first to have children, so we were the first to drift apart, as we were the first to enter the ‘ordinary’ world. One by one, the others too gave in, as they started their families – you couldn’t handle that pace.⁴⁸⁸

Pina concluded:

The decline happened when we started finding a job and becoming ‘integrated’. That could have been the best [political] moment – because you had a job, and you were a worker like them, so you could carry on shared battles together. [But working] made you tired, and you couldn’t handle the pace of political activism. Then you got the kids, and then – it was ’79-’80 – there was [state] repression.⁴⁸⁹

Both libertarians strove to find a balance between their activism and their ‘ordinary’ jobs, but they could not. As the young libertarians made their first steps into the world of work, they soon became overcome by tiredness and gave in. Having a job was the main cause for libertarians dropping out of activism: people struggled to find time for both, as running a social centre or organising political struggles require a large amount of energy and time. In the case of rural communes, libertarians were usually required to both work the land and participate in the management of the community. Although some communards – like Vito – managed to maintain a job outside the community, this situation required a lot of flexibility and stamina because work in a commune ‘never finish[es]’. Being involved in a squatting community meanwhile sometime allowed for a more enduring commitment because – with no rent to pay – people could do temporary jobs or live on benefits. All the former squatters I interviewed are in fact convinced that it is precisely for this reason that governments have hit squatting hard. Squatting has always been illegal in Italy, and it has become increasingly difficult to squat or claim benefits in Britain.

2.3 Family time

Starting to work full-time and starting a family often happened in the same period, as the case of Luciano Sepe and Pina Buttiglione shows. Even just having children could be a major drawback for libertarian activists. Arcangelo was a founder of the mid-1990s Barese CSOA Fucine Meridionali. When the social centre ended, he first moved to Germany, and then returned to Bari to start an independent bookshop and also a family. Although he contributed to the more recent

⁴⁸⁸ Sepe, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁴⁸⁹ Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA.

Barese social centres by writing open letters in support and donating books, he never participated in the management of another CSOA after Fucine. He claimed not to have time, and asked: ‘If you have an evening off, you have to choose: do I spend it in an assembly or with my son?’.⁴⁹⁰ Some communities resolve this problem by opening some forms of self-managed crèche – another example of ‘reproductive labour’. Frestonia had a crèche, and Shelley Assiter found this a particularly positive aspect for her. After a first short experience in contact with ‘David Bowie freaks’ in a squat in Muswell Hill (‘Insane. They were mad as hatters’), she moved to Freston Road, where ‘it was huge, and the kids loved it because it was like living in the country – it was very exciting. Quite dangerous, looking back. Health and safety would condemn it [laughs]’. Nevertheless, there she found the crèche, where: ‘About six of us – six mothers – [took] it in turns to look after the kids for the whole day ... and we would have two days off for ourselves. We created a community, and the babies pretty much felt like brothers and sisters’. Thanks to that support network, she felt safe and could actually bring up two children and even re-train as a psychotherapist.⁴⁹¹

Like Frestonia, Urupia too had a system of adults taking turns to look after the children of the community, and also hosted Summer camps for external children. The communards also opened a libertarian school in 2015. This is open to all children living in the local area. Such practices encouraged the arrival of more families as temporary guests. Thea said that this has resulted in an increase in the number of families: ‘Maybe the family come here once, and the kids bond, and the mums as well’, and then they return.⁴⁹² The key to attracting new families of libertarians – and to keep existing ones – is therefore making sure that the community cater for the needs of those families. However, Vito – who has a child with another Urupia communard – mentioned a new possible issue for families:

I’d like to live here until the end, but I might be elsewhere in ten years’ time. This is also quite normal because, if you come to live here, you don’t spare yourself. We struggle accepting people who spare themselves. It’d be good to be able to live your whole life here being able to have your own spaces, to travel- That way, you wouldn’t feel after fifteen years that you’ve given all you could give, and wouldn’t say: ‘That’s it. I’m off to Berlin to live with my partner now that my children are at uni’. Because that’s the risk – especially since you need more peace as you get older.⁴⁹³

Communities like Urupia might have solved the issue of families with young children, but still have to find a work-life balance that adjusts to all stages of human life. In the long term, a community’s intense workload – imposed by rhythms of nature, limited resources and small numbers of workers – can wear out and push away even highly motivated libertarians like Vito.

⁴⁹⁰ Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

⁴⁹¹ Assiter, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁹² Thea, Interview on Urupia.

⁴⁹³ Vito, Interview on Urupia.

Although perhaps not as demanding as living in rural communes, being involved in squats and social centres can be quite time consuming too – and the absence of ‘services’ like crèches can alienate libertarian parents. As in the case of working parents like Arcangelo, they might prefer to spend time with their children rather than in long assemblies. Furthermore, many social centres present – to quote Shelley – ‘quite dangerous’ situations, which might induce parents to worry for the safety of their children. Ex-Caserna, for instance, had been abandoned for decades and despite the best efforts of activists, there were still banisters missing. In 1970s Frestonia, Josefine worried for her child. She wanted ‘somewhere safe’ for her son and was concerned about ‘the scrapyards next door’ and the type of people that populated Frestonia: ‘It’s not much fun to have alcoholics one way, drug dealers the other way’.⁴⁹⁴ ‘I became more discerning about what I want around me’ – she said – ‘It’s like having prolonged teenage years ... And I wanted stability’. After years of squatting in London, Mary too decided to abandon that lifestyle, and settle into a mainstream way of life. She realised she ‘want[ed] to live that sort of comfortable, bourgeois life’. She gradually came to consider her previous way of life as ‘youthfully idealistic’ because – she said – ‘I don’t think there’s much chance that could ever become something which was integrated at a macro level’.⁴⁹⁵

As they grew older, some libertarians – like Josefine and Mary – developed the desire for a more comfortable and stable way of life. Sometimes they also started diminishing or even mocking their own past life and beliefs by labelling them ‘idealistic’. I encountered this attitude quite frequently among former activists/squatters who had later opted for a more ‘bourgeois life’. Other experienced activists elaborated a different approach. Thea, for example, realised after moving to Urupia that: ‘The “ideal” is beautiful but, in day-to-day practice ... it adapts to life’. This, she added, ‘made me less ideological and more open to welcoming the human that is within me’.⁴⁹⁶ By accepting the imperfect nature of real-life libertarianism, and the need for a lifelong process of trial-and-error, Thea managed to adjust her beliefs instead of rejecting them altogether. A third group of experienced activists meanwhile abandoned their libertarian communities due to burnout. A woman in her mid-twenties – who chose the pseudonym Jo – shared her story with me. Even though Jo is still young, she had been politically active since she was fifteen and had gained a lot of experience. She said:

I’m not involved in any long-term campaigning anymore ... [because] one, I’m busy; two, I needed a break – the term is ‘burnout’. I was emotionally exhausted from years of political campaigning ... [because] political campaigning is generally surrounding very emotionally challenging topics ... The subject matter is often deeply saddening. It can wear you down emotionally after some time – making all of your life about focusing on things that are distressing ... like the two years I spent in Calais supporting migrant communities there, and I’m thinking of the months that I spent in the West Bank in Palestine trying to show solidarity with the people in the occupation there, and I’m

⁴⁹⁴ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁴⁹⁵ Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London.

⁴⁹⁶ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

thinking about the antimilitarist campaign I was also involved in. And just the sheer weight, the sheer gravity of the subject matter [made it impossible for me to continue].⁴⁹⁷

Nowadays, Jo is still involved in the management of Kebele social centre in Bristol but mostly helps out as a cook for the vegan café. Because of work, family, ‘burnout’ or a change in life objectives, many experienced libertarians abandoned their communities. As a consequence, it is more common to find people in their twenties in squats, social centres and communes. In Bibi’s experience in the 1990s, most of the people squatting with her were ‘teenagers mainly, and some in their early twenties’. Young people also frequently leave libertarian communities. In fact, by talking with my interviewees and observing certain spaces over some time – like Ex-Caserma, where I returned several times for more interviews – I observed a high turnover among young activists. My first thought was that this made sense for two reasons: firstly, there were already more young people than older activists (for the reasons we have seen before), it was therefore statistically more likely that more young people would leave. Secondly, although fewer, the older activists were probably more motivated, since they had already resisted the mainstream for many years. Bibi said in her interview that there were ‘people closer to thirty’ in her squatting community, but added they ‘already looked really old. And I know that’s partly because [that’s what you think] when you’re young – but also because of the lifestyle [that made people age] really fast’.⁴⁹⁸ Here, she referred to the widespread consumption of alcohol and drugs among young squatters, and to the harsh conditions that many endure in their precarious situation – especially with the introduction of increasingly repressive laws on squatting in Britain. This is enough to make a person age fast, and can be a factor in the decision to move on. Libertarians generally sought to live a ‘libertarian time’ in their communities, but these are immersed in the mainstream and subject to its pressures and influences on a daily basis. In the long run, many surrendered to them.

3. A ‘libertarian memory’

When more experienced people abandon a community, the community – and often the wider radical movement too – loses its own historical memory. This makes the inter-generational transmission of memory more difficult, and might mean new generations of radicals repeat old mistakes. In this section I want to explore how libertarians preserved (or failed to preserve) their historical memory – a ‘libertarian memory’. This is a memory that, like the libertarians’ relation with time, is ‘queer’ – it eschews the traditional role of memory transmission as preservation of the dominant culture and structures. Libertarian memory is in fact about theories and practices that challenged the mainstream. To better appreciate the persistence – or lack of – of historical

⁴⁹⁷ Jo, Interview on Kebele.

⁴⁹⁸ Bibi, Interview on squatting in London.

memory, I will focus mainly on the libertarian communities of one city (Bari), even though I will make comparisons with other Italian and British case studies.

3.1 The dualism of 1970s Italian libertarians towards memory

Politics in 1970s Italy was incredibly pervasive. When I spoke with some libertarian activists that engaged in active politics in Bari in the 1970s, I could hardly recognise the city in which I was born and raised. Pina Buttiglione was one of the women running the San Pasquale neighbourhood committee, and she told me: ‘there was ferment because it was 1968-’70, and in those years the political movements were inside the schools’.⁴⁹⁹ Such political movements, often under the name of collectives, organised school assemblies and occupations which, another activist (Donato Romito) noted, politicised a whole generation of young Italians.⁵⁰⁰ When several of these teenagers entered university, they generally became familiar with a long list of tiny radical groups: ‘at that time, [confirmed Salvatore Caggese] the faculty of Arts [of Bari] was the heart of the local political movement, whose principal and predominant groups were all Marxist-Leninist – Lotta Continua, the Fourth International’.⁵⁰¹ Thus, it was common for many teenagers – like Pina – to attend some political meetings with friends ‘in order to better understand the situation’. There, she explained, ‘you came in contact with all this varied political world. So, depending on what you wanted, you’d come closer to one group or another’.⁵⁰²

Within that atmosphere of political ferment, young activists like Silvana Donno and Gino Ancona felt the urge to make a revolution, but did not know how. Silvana was an anarcho-communist militant together with Pina, Donato, Salvatore and Gino. She told me: ‘We thought we had no history in the Seventies’. It was only as an adult that things changed: ‘Today, I’m no militant of anything, but I’m still an anarchist and – above all – I haven’t lost interest in the feminist question. By doing some research, I found out that ... in truth we did have a history – only, nobody had told it to us’.⁵⁰³ Gino described himself as one of the charismatic leaders of the late-1960s student movement in Bitonto (near Bari). He claimed: ‘We ran after things – the Valpreda campaign ... We ran after things, we had no strategy ... We fought against the representation of power, but had no idea where to go. We wanted to make the revolution to achieve anarchy, but didn’t know how’.⁵⁰⁴ In an attempt to make sense of their present and find a viable political strategy, Gino and his comrades participated in the rediscovery of past revolutionaries and thinkers, especially from the period of ‘classical anarchism’ (1860s-1940s). Radical publishers translated and (re)printed works of various authors like the Delo Truda group

⁴⁹⁹ Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁵⁰⁰ Donato Romito, Interview on OAP-ORA, 2 November 2009.

⁵⁰¹ Caggese, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁵⁰² Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁵⁰³ Silvana Donno, Interview on OAP-ORA, 14 July 2010.

⁵⁰⁴ The Valpreda campaign was the campaign to ask for the release of Valpreda. Initially arrested as one of suspected authors of the Piazza Fontana bombing in 1969.

of anarchist exiles to France after the Russian revolution of 1917.⁵⁰⁵ Their text – the so-called Platform of anarchist communists of 1926 – was particularly influential for the theoretical formation of Gino and his comrades.

At the same time, the Barese anarchists overlooked histories that were much closer both temporally and spatially. Apulia – the southern Italian region encompassing Bari and Bitonto – had had an important anarchist history dating back to the late nineteenth century. At that time, the Apulian Carlo Cafiero first co-founded the Italian branch of the First International, and then participated in attempted uprisings before fleeing into Switzerland. Another fundamental Apulian experience was that of Canosa – a rural town that had been a reference point for the Italian anarchist movement until the 1960s. It was so important that the Italian Anarchist Federation held its congress there in 1948. Gino, now in his sixties, told me with a sense of bitterness that he did meet anarchists from Canosa: ‘These comrades had been introduced to us as senile fucks ... After so much time, this thing still pains me because we needed to create a different type of relationship with them. We could’ve learned from their experience. They could’ve helped us’. He continued: ‘We read books [to learn about] what had happened before, but had close-by those who’d made history. Yet, we thought they were senile’.⁵⁰⁶ His bitterness is now renewed with a fear that his own experience will be forgotten because present-day activists mostly ignore the history of Gino and the other Barese anarchist communists.

The post-1968 lack of historical memory was an issue in Britain as well. When I met John, a former squatter from Brighton, I immediately asked him if he had heard of Harry Cowley, the famous Brighton anarchist who kick-started a wave of squatting after the Second World War. He said: ‘For me it was just free housing ... I knew nothing about squatting before [moving to London]’.⁵⁰⁷ Later I asked Nigel Castle, another former squatter, if the 1970s squatting scene of London had a political movement it aspired to. He replied: ‘We were it! We were the example’.⁵⁰⁸ Reflecting on these answers, both the British and the Italian libertarian movements of the 1970s appear to be self-referential. Besides the literal influence of rediscovered authors (Delo Truda group) and personal necessities (‘for me it was just free housing’), the actions of people like Silvana, Gino, John and Nigel seemed to follow a broader pattern. Without the direct help and advice of older comrades, they acted under the influence of a ‘subcultural Zeitgeist’ (or ‘spirit of time’). The influence of a subcultural Zeitgeist is also evident in the statement of another former squatter – Pino. He was among the group of anarchists that in 1976 opened the squat and social centre Conchetta in Milan. When I asked Pino about the reasons behind the foundation of Conchetta, he answered:

⁵⁰⁵ Gruppo degli anarchici russi all'estero, *Piattaforma Organizzativa dell'Unione Generale Degli Anarchici (Bozza)*, 1926, <http://fdca.it/storico/piattaformanuova.htm>.

⁵⁰⁶ Ancona, Interview on post-1968 anarchism in Italy.

⁵⁰⁷ John, Interview on squatting in London.

⁵⁰⁸ Nigel Castle, Interview on squatting in London, 22 February 2016.

We were in the ‘squatting season’ in Milan. The biggest occupations start in those years: ’75-’76. In 1975 the Garibaldi social centre started – that doesn’t exist anymore – then the Leoncavallo social centre, and then Via Correggio, and then Via Conchetta. These were the most historical social centres of Milan.⁵⁰⁹

The same year of Conchetta’s foundation, an article in the anarchist magazine *A-Rivista* presented the occupation as ‘a common scene that is happening frequently in Milan’.⁵¹⁰ What made the Conchetta-Torricelli occupation different was that it was the first occupation made by anarchists in the city. Other occupation committees were connected to *Autonomia* (autonomy) or *circoli del proletariato giovanile* (clubs of proletarian youth), or Metropolitan Indians – all parts of the revolutionary Left of the 1970s. Such contemporary experiences had contributed to creating the perception, among 1970s radicals, that occupying buildings was the natural answer to the housing crisis and lack of social spaces. Be it in Britain or in Italy, the libertarians of the 1970s overcame their lack of historical memory by becoming self-referential. They shared experiences and learned from each other within their own contemporary subcultural Zeitgeist. There was however a difference between the more politicised Italian scene and the more countercultural British context. Italians had developed a dual attitude towards libertarian memory. In 1970s Italy, a new generation of activists involved in the new social movements entered the anarchist movement and clashed with ideas and methods of their older comrades. This led young anarchists to overlook the memory of more experienced militants. Meanwhile, they sought in ‘classical’ anarchist literature a framework to make sense of their present and organise political actions. Their perception of social revolution as imminent made them identify with (and idealise) the generations of radicals that theorised and fought in real revolutions.

3.2 Bridging the intergenerational ‘libertarian memory’ gap in 1990s Italy

A combination of tensions within the Italian radical movement and late-1970s state repression caused a period of *Riflusso* (Ebb) that led many libertarians to drop out of active politics. In Bari, the neighbourhood committee of San Pasquale – in which Pina, Silvana and other anarcho-communists were actively involved – closed down. The memory of the committee waned rapidly due partly also to its focus on a single neighbourhood. Years later, in 1984, local punks occupied an abandoned space in the industrial area of Stanic. They opened Bari’s first punk social centre (Giungla), but it was a short-lived experiment as they soon ‘self-evicted’ after receiving threats from organised crime. For a short period, they met at Anarres – a rented social and cultural club named after feminist science-fiction author Ursula Le Guin’s libertarian fictional planet – founded by Ebb ‘survivors’. This was a space that encompassed militants from the wider radical Left.⁵¹¹

Giungla punks later rented a space for playing and socialising, thus reviving the Giungla as a club. Bari would gain a new social centre only in 1994 (Fucine Meridionali), but the existence

⁵⁰⁹ Pino, Interview on Milan social centres.

⁵¹⁰ Editorial Staff, ‘La Casa È Di Chi L’abita’.

⁵¹¹ Giuseppe Carbonara, Interview on OAP-ORA, 21 August 2010.

of the Giungla club allowed the memory of the Giungla social centre to survive and reach the generation of Fucine Meridionali. The early-1990s *Zeitgeist* was instrumental in the occupation of Fucine, like the mid-1970s squatting wave that inspired the occupation of Conchetta in Milan. The 1990 nationwide protests against the *riforma* Ruberti (Ruberti Education Act) led to a wave of university occupations, and to many social centres opening in Italy. Additionally, Arcangelo, one of the founders of Fucine Meridionali, told me that in the days leading to the occupation of Fucine, they felt like Bari was ‘the only city without [a social centre]’. They wanted to change this. The experience of Giungla was also influential; Arcangelo told me:

We started meeting at the Giungla club to discuss social spaces. There were some people from the Giungla [social centre], especially punks. There was a strong continuity. There was this guy, who is now a vet, he was already a vet then, Nicola, who had been in the anarcho-punk Giungla [social centre], then the Giungla club, the Fucine Meridionali until the end, including San Marcello. There was still somebody from the Giungla [social centre] ... they didn’t have a role in memory transmission, unfortunately. Yes, we’d talk about Giungla while having a pint together, but there was no memory-transmission moment. They did so individually, not as a group.⁵¹²

Although Arcangelo believes there was no ‘memory-transmission moment’, Nicola and the other former Giungla anarcho-punks who helped set up Fucine passed down their own experience informally. This highlights the importance of individuals in preserving the historical memory of radical experiments. In addition to this the very existence of the Giungla club was important for the foundation of Fucine as it worked both as a meeting space and as a place to meet other activists – like Nicola. Fucine Meridionali was in fact a highly politicised space.

The combination of late-1970s Ebb and 1980s experiences like Giungla – more subcultural than political – had created an intergenerational gap of historical radical memory. To bridge this gap, 1990s activists invited ‘survivors’ of the 1970s. Gennaro, another former Fucine activist, explained:

I felt humanely close to those who made heavy choices in the Seventies: the choice of armed struggle. Deciding on the life of a man is not something you do easily: it was 17-year-olds ... who had tough life experiences, jail, repression. ... In the early Nineties, when we discussed [state repression and] prisons ... it was very formative for me to meet them, listen to their experiences. It made me understand the importance of understanding what’s really going on before choosing.⁵¹³

In the mid-1990s, Italy was starting its transition into a polarised political system with an increasingly weak Left. This was a system that would be dominated by the figure of neoliberal

⁵¹² Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

⁵¹³ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

tycoon Berlusconi for the coming twenty years. Within this context, the lives and experiences of former 1970s activists – including *lottarmatisti* (people involved in the armed struggle) – appeared stimulating and fascinating. These were people who had believed in the inevitability of revolution, and fought for it.

Fucine was a highly political space. Gennaro told me that there were people from different political backgrounds like anarchism, *Autonomia*, the communist group Lotta Continua, and the Pantera student movement. There, he met ‘beautiful people that taught me a lot of things’. Such a diversity generated moments of debate and mutual enrichment. They even took part in national camps of ‘political elaboration’ where:

Young activists found themselves facing people with twenty years of political experience. So ... you kept quiet during the assemblies because you shat yourself, because your political elaboration wasn’t strong enough to contribute. So, some started reading, studying, to be able to participate with complex contributions.⁵¹⁴

By talking with older activists, Arcangelo and Gennaro learned from their practical experiences. Readings and music were also fundamental for their political formation – and often interconnected, as Arcangelo told me:

I remember I came across Malatesta’s writings, but I can’t remember if this happened because I’d started listening to the Crass or the other way round. Probably at the same time. I remember going as a kid to Canosa for the celebration of the anarchists. I had these kinds of experiences. Probably also as a reaction to my family tradition, which belonged to the classic PCI [Italian Communist Party] – I don’t come from [the right], but I felt more libertarian. I don’t remember though if came first the music or the reading. Probably at the same time.⁵¹⁵

Arcangelo’s mention of the Crass, Malatesta and Canosa is revealing in terms of his attitudes towards the history of the anarchist movement and the persistence of its memory. In the late-1980s and early-1990s, when Arcangelo was in his twenties, the British anarcho-punk band Crass (1977-84) represented to him the countercultural aspect and international dimension of anarchism. The readings of Errico Malatesta, the famous Italian anarchist thinker and revolutionary of early-twentieth century, provided him with a theoretical framework and introduced him to ‘classical anarchism’. Finally, his ‘peregrinations’ to Canosa represented his attempt to find a connection with a local manifestation of the history of the anarchist movement. He was more interested in relating to aspects of anarchism from his present and distant past than in more recent experiences like Giungla. Arcangelo shared this characteristic with Gino’s 1970s generation, who were involved in rediscovering anarchist revolutionaries and theories from the 1920s rather than valuing the experience and expertise of Canosa’s anarchists. They did so because they recognised their own lack of theoretical preparation. The disappearance of the 1970s Barese anarcho-

⁵¹⁴ Gennaro.

⁵¹⁵ Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

communists from the activist scene had left Arcangelo's generation politically orphaned, and pushed them towards 'classical anarchist' theories and successful practical experiments. They sought continuity by rediscovering their political roots.

Relationships between different generations of libertarian activists were equally problematic in Britain. Throughout the 1990s, Carolyn was particularly active in two libertarian communities in London – the squatted area around Claremont Road in Leytonstone (east London) during the 'No M11' campaign, and the social centre 121 Centre in the Brixton area (south London) where she also squatted. Each of these two experiences shed light on aspects of the intergenerational passing-down of historical memory that can be helpful in understanding the attitude of Italian libertarians as well. In the first half of the 1990s, radical activists coming from different parts of Britain joined local communities in the struggle opposing the construction of the M11 Link road. They squatted entire neighbourhoods in the areas affected by the construction project, and started referring to these areas as 'independent republics' – such as Leytonstonia in Leytonstone. Carolyn admitted that the idea came from 'Frestonia and all that sort of thinking – and many people said: "Oh, let's make our own passports"'.⁵¹⁶ This episode shows that Carolyn's generation of 1990s activists valued the experience of 1970s squatters like Shelley and Josefine as they tried to replicate the successful experiment of Frestonia. By declaring independence, they wanted to attract the attention of the public – hoping the media and the people would side with them and help them stop the road construction. Carolyn was not aware of any direct contact between her generation and Shelley's and Josefine's, but Frestonia's case was so famous nationwide that its memory had evidently survived. This had not happened with San Pasquale neighbourhood committee in Bari because it remained a small radical experiment, whereas Frestonia had attracted reporters from abroad and made the history of the squatting movement.⁵¹⁷

Carolyn mentioned direct intergenerational interaction during the last years of the 121 Centre (1981-99), when:

People that got involved in the second half of the Nineties [met with] people who got involved in the 121 Centre in the Eighties and were still around. They'd got so much more experience of the building than we had. But, if you had a meeting, everyone contributed – whether a person'd been there for ten years or ten weeks. Everyone was equal in terms of making decisions.⁵¹⁸

She describes a space where the two generations coexisted. There, younger activists like Carolyn who had joined a pre-existing community valued the experience and expertise of the older ones. At Fucine Meridionali, Arcangelo's and Nicola's generations built the space together. This levelled the different grades of experience making Arcangelo's generation less willing to know

⁵¹⁶ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part one).

⁵¹⁷ Steve Platt, 'A Whole New Ball Game', in *Squatting: The Real Story*, ed. Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar (London: Bay Leaf, 1980), 91–94.

⁵¹⁸ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

about Giungla. Completely different again was Carolyn's relationship with another generation of activists in the same area as the 121 Centre:

There were lots of gay people squatting in Brixton in the Seventies, and lots of projects and organisations started in the same streets – like Lesbians and Gays Switchboard, for example, and gay newspapers, and lots of feminist groups started ... Further down the street [from 121 Centre] there was a housing co-op that was started as a ... Gay Liberation Front commune ... Despite this, our generation – who called ourselves queer, and had this anarcho-queer group, and these events at 121, and organised all these queer gatherings with hundreds of people turning up – didn't have any direct links with that generation of gay squatters a few hundred metres away. Just because it was a different scene ... They were literally walking past the building where we were doing these queer events.⁵¹⁹

That same generation – Carolyn's 1990s anarcho-queer-punks based in Brixton – had developed at the same time two very different relationships with previous generations of local activists. Carolyn cooperated and recognised the experience of 1980s anarcho-punks with which they shared the same space (121 Centre) whereas, although she acknowledged the history of 1970s gay and lesbian activists living nearby, she had no interaction with them. According to her, the two generations remained separate because:

Maybe they didn't want to call themselves queer ... At that point there were so many different scenes and communities and subcultures operating in Brixton, using the squattable space, that you could have a very full and fulfilling life and do lots of stuff without even having to interact with these people ... That was just the intensity of how much stuff was constricted in that area. ... The Gay Liberation Front did have a very radical politics and we had lots in common politically, but there was just this generational divide ... Maybe they were put off by that East European punk aesthetic – unless you like that punk look. The one way in which the 121 maybe felt a little bit exclusionary to people was it was very punk rock ... some people didn't feel as welcome because they didn't look the right way.⁵²⁰

Carolyn identified two possible reasons. Firstly, an appearance-related 'generational divide', and secondly the richness of Brixton's subcultures that generated multiple self-contained scenes. The latter resonates with what former squatters told me about the situation they lived in 1970s London, when squatted areas were so numerous and large that people spent most of their time within their own community.⁵²¹ A form of 'generational divide' emerged also in 1990s Bari, although the reasons appeared to be the disappearance of most pre-Ebb 1970s activists, and a different attitude towards politics on the part of the 1980s libertarians. Arcangelo and Gennaro's generation had been politicised by the national Zeitgeist characterised by university protests and a revival of social centres. This generation disregarded recent experiences like Giungla, which was more an expression of punk subculture. Intergenerational memory-transmission happened there

⁵¹⁹ Carolyn.

⁵²⁰ Carolyn.

⁵²¹ Cook, "'Gay Times': Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970's London".

nonetheless for various reasons. One is the existence of places (Giungla club and Fucine) where different generations of activists met and became involved in the construction of a common space. This was possible also because Bari was smaller and with fewer radical subjects than London, which brought transgenerational and heterogeneous political scenes together to effectively manage the space. There, informal discussions and planned debates bridged the intergenerational memory gap and led ‘some’ younger activists to further explore the ‘libertarian memory’ through punk music and by rediscovering classical radical works.

3.3 No time for historical memory: Young activists in the 2010s

Issues with the transmission of historical memories are identifiable today in libertarian communities. Gennaro is currently involved in the Ex-Caserma Liberata social centre of Bari, opened in 2014. He told me that he often tried to ‘transmit’ the memory of Fucine Meridionali while talking with younger activists at Ex-Caserma. His intention was mostly to pass down what he deemed ‘good practices’ or, conversely, to try to avoid the repetition of what he saw as mistakes. However, he said laughing that they tended to react calling him an ‘old fart’ and a ‘pain in the arse’, and explaining: ‘it’s not like that anymore ... those things don’t work anymore’.⁵²² While Arcangelo seemed to respect the Giungla experience even though he disregarded its minor politicisation, present-day activists overlooked Fucine as an expression of ‘old activism’ – an experience from which they had nothing to learn.

When I spoke with younger activists of Ex-Caserma, they seemed generally less aware of the tradition of the radical/libertarian movement and of its theoretical framework. Gennaro stated that ‘I realised I was a libertarian by reading, [as] I realised that I used to buy a lot of libertarian literature from the beginning of the [twentieth] century’, like Malatesta’s works. His perception of present-day 20-year-olds at Ex-Caserma, meanwhile, was that they had no interest in reading. He told me he often has to shout at them: ‘Oi, you gotta read, gotta write, or you ain’t never gonna take a step forward, politically!’.⁵²³ A few months after the 2014 opening of Ex-Caserma, I could verify Gennaro’s words as I met with three young activists who chose as pseudonyms Gianni, Sid and Veganauro. Veganauro’s name choice is particularly revealing of the relation between libertarian activists and the tradition of the radical Left – as well as of the self-definition of activists. He had formed his new name by adding ‘vegan’ to ‘Auro’. The two parts of his name summed up his coexisting political souls: anti-specism and anti-fascism. Auro Bruni was in fact a young activist killed by neo-fascists in Rome in 1991, and Veganauro had recently seen a documentary about him which had particularly impressed him. Besides explaining his political views, the story of his pseudonym also exemplifies one way in which contemporary libertarians – especially young ones – experience and relate to the history of the radical/libertarian movement.

⁵²² Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

⁵²³ Gennaro.

Veganauro admitted they had not ‘read much about all that had happened in the history of anarchism. Well, I know some things’ – he claimed – ‘but I’d have loved to learn more’. Their theory about anarchist currents was the result of their lack of readings. Gianni and Sid presented a supposed dualism between a ‘white’ and a ‘red anarchy’, with the latter representing chaos and ‘destruction for destruction’s sake’, whereas white anarchists (like them) ‘believe in destruction followed by reconstruction’, as well as in ‘anti-specism, respect for the human being, the Earth, and all living beings’. However, I could find no trace of the existence of such terms and definitions in the literature, and no other anarchist interviewee made reference to such things.⁵²⁴ Tony, another activist in his twenties, mostly spoke of recent episodes and thinkers as he told me of readings that informed his politics. He mentioned Toni Negri, the Comité invisible, and Luther Blissett/Wu Ming – all contemporary writers. The first is one of the key figures and theorists of 1970s *Autonomia*, although he has been writing extensively since then, whereas the Comité invisible and Luther Blissett/Wu Ming are writers’ collectives. The former is an anonymous French group or individual with libertarian ideas that wrote two political tracts (in 2007 and 2014), and the latter is a collective of Italian writers that has produced novels and radical pamphlets since the late 1990s. Tony struggled to mention these three authors, all contemporary.

Veganauro, Gianni, Sid and Tony’s testimonies are indicative of the little interest that younger generations of libertarians have in the tradition and theoretical framework of the radical/libertarian movement altogether. Tony claimed to be interested in:

Movements like ‘Occupy’ and ‘Anonymous’ – all movements that managed to go beyond opinions and get to the heart of the system ... [with a focus on] atomisation, globalisation, and ‘information bulimia’ ... and rather than trying to slow down this fragmentation, we must highlight its positive aspects and make the most of them, exactly like Anonymous. However, locally, where there’s no [awareness of such methods], aiming for ‘aggregation’ – which dates back to the theories of twenty or thirty years ago – is what can give you the strength to change something.⁵²⁵

Here Tony expressed his admiration for this type of post-ideological and direct action-based movements with a distinct libertarian profile. His references to the ‘theories’ were somewhat negative, since he first identified them with the opposite of action, and then with some obsolete way of thinking. This diverges greatly from the growing current within the anarchist movement that today promotes a constant dialogue between theory and practice, since it is argued that from theoretical reflections can derive well-planned political actions, and theoretical reflections after political actions can help enhance future actions.⁵²⁶ In addition, what they learned about the theoretical framework of the radical thought was generally through their present socio-political background. Similarly to 1970s militants, younger present-day activists seemed to prioritise

⁵²⁴ Gianni, Sid, and Veganauro, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata.

⁵²⁵ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

⁵²⁶ Luca Lapolla, ‘Appunti Sull’anarchismo Moderno’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, December 2016, <http://www.arivista.org/index.php?nr=412&pag=83.htm&key=lapolla>.

action over historical reflections and theoretical debates, although the former valued the memory of classical anarchist authors. This suggests that both generations saw a major political struggle as both urgent and possible. The difference is that while the 1970s Italian Zeitgeist presented a social revolution as possible, current social movements have mostly been fighting neoliberal globalisation (and its embodiments) back.

4. Conclusion

My investigation of the time of libertarians – how they produce, perceive and preserve time – had showed that there is indeed a ‘libertarian time’. This is a form of ‘queer temporality’ that eschews and opposes mainstream norms. Activists and squatters have been producing ‘libertarian time’ by interacting within their communities in opposition to ‘capitalist time’ – the ‘abstract exchange value that allows work to be translated into money’. What characterises libertarian time is the refusal of this model by embodying its contrary – manifestations of this are the chronic lateness of many libertarians and the adoption of decisional processes that prioritise democracy over rapidity. However, it is impossible to escape the all-pervasiveness of capitalism in the contemporary world. Hence, libertarian time is ‘corrupted’ by capitalist time. For instance, the lifespan of a community often depends on the stability of the space and on the involvement of a large enough group of activists. The former is threatened by the existence of private property, as libertarians have to either purchase or rent a space to avoid the precariousness of squatted premises. The latter is endangered by capitalist rhythms of life leading most people to work for money and raise children in nuclear families. Both behaviours drastically reduce the amount of time that libertarians can dedicate to their community, and in fact push many libertarians away from activism and fully back into the capitalist system. One of the consequences is that their historical memory and the memory of previous communities is taken elsewhere, thus leaving newer generations of libertarians to repeat old mistakes.

The main function of transmitting ‘libertarian memory’ was thus the preservation of radical theories and practices aiming at subverting the mainstream. The modes of memory transmission and intergenerational cooperation, however, have changed in the history of post-1968 communities. They reflected and adapted to changes in the Zeitgeist. An example of this is the wider libertarian community of Bari, where 1970s anarchists developed a dual attitude towards the past. The belief in their own revolutionary potential led them to disregard the experience of previous generations, whereas they valued the memory of ‘classical anarchists’ with whom they identified. By contrast, the more conservative outlook of 1990s Bari led heterogeneous generations of libertarians to share spaces, memories and experiences. This helped them bridge the intergenerational memory gap created by late-1970s Ebb. Whereas, the urgency for concrete actions in contemporary communities has prioritised the role of action, and confined ‘libertarian memory’ to a utilitarian function. They mostly valued recent experiences and theoretical reflections, as they deemed them more relevant to their current political and social struggles.

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated that both ‘libertarian time’ and ‘libertarian memory’ are oppositional and alternative to the mainstream ideas of time and memory. What my analysis has also showed, however, is that there is a tension between their ‘queerness’ and the ‘normality’ that surrounds them. Example of this are the difficulty for libertarians to find an activism-life balance due to the pervasiveness of mainstream concepts like nuclear family and productive work, and also the idealisation of historical radical figures that characterised for instance the 1970s rediscovery of ‘classical anarchists’ or Gennaro’s admiration for *lottarmatisti* in the 1990s. This reminded me of the conservative narrative of ‘Golden Age’, which Gerard Delanty described as a sense of nostalgia of a past that perhaps never existed in those terms.⁵²⁷ I will continue my analysis on the pervasiveness of mainstream ideas and practices in the following chapter, as I investigate the persistence of gender, ‘race’ and class privilege in libertarian communities.

⁵²⁷ Delanty, *Community*, 151; Wetherell, Laflèche, and Berkeley, *Identity, Ethnic Diversity and Community Cohesion*, 99.

Chapter Four

An ordinary (counter)culture:

Everyday negotiations in libertarian communities

French scholar Michel de Certeau dedicated his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* to ‘the ordinary man’, the ‘anonymous hero’ – ‘a multitude of quantified heroes who lose names and faces as they become the ciphered river of the streets’. In his introduction he stated that his investigation of the ways in which ordinary people ‘operate’ grew out of the studies of ‘marginal groups’, but it aimed to go beyond the counterculture, which he saw as ‘already singled out, often privileged, and already partly absorbed into folklore’.⁵²⁸ In my research, I have encountered many people who are, or have been, involved in spaces – squats, communes and social centres – that are part of this so-called counterculture. Even though they are engaged in extraordinary activities such as setting up a libertarian school or sabotaging the construction of a new road, the people I met would reflect de Certeau’s definition of ordinary people – and of anonymous heroes as well. ‘A heroism both enormous and collective, on the model of ants’, wrote de Certeau – quoting Musil – in the first part of the book: ‘A very ordinary culture’.⁵²⁹

The heroism that de Certeau found in the way in which ‘common people’ challenge the culture of the ‘dominant economic order’ by making ‘innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules’.⁵³⁰ This heroism is anonymous because it is performed by individuals within the amorphous multitude. However, in the case of libertarian squatters and activists, ‘heroism’ lay in their decision to find time and energy – within their lives as nameless and faceless ‘ordinary people’ – to actively step out and/or directly oppose the dominant culture and economy. Such heroism is indeed ‘collective’ because they chose to challenge the widespread individualism for cooperation and mutual aid, and it is also ‘anonymous’ precisely because collective – and sometimes because illegal as well. A heroism, however, that – as this chapter will illustrate – is not immune from the effects of privilege, which Peggy McIntosh described as unearned entitlements giving one group power over another.⁵³¹

Like de Certeau’s ‘ordinary man’, each libertarian too ‘is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of ... relational determinations interact’. Yet, such social and cultural relations acted in opposite ways in ‘ordinary men’ and libertarians. Example of de

⁵²⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), xii.

⁵²⁹ de Certeau, 1.

⁵³⁰ de Certeau, xii–xiv.

⁵³¹ Peggy McIntosh, ‘White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies’, in *Privilege: A Reader*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber (Boulder: Westview, 2003), 147–60.

Certeau's subversion of the dominant culture from within is the case of the American indigenous peoples under Spanish rule:

Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often *made of* the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept. They were *other* within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them.⁵³²

The contradictions between the culture of the coloniser and of that of the colonised produced a hybrid culture that only apparently replicated the dominant framework. Such idea of subaltern resistance to dominant cultures returned also in the work of anarchist anthropologist James C. Scott who analysed the phenomenon in a Malaysian village.⁵³³ What I noticed talking with my interviewees and visiting some libertarian spaces – and what I want to explore in this chapter – is that such contradictions exist among libertarians too. In fact, while de Certeau's 'ordinary people' accidentally subvert the dominant system by adapting it to their own interests and rules, sometimes libertarians involuntarily undermine their own experiments by replicating habits they absorbed in the dominant system.

Here, I will focus on three themes at the centre of modern-day analyses of discrimination, domination, and oppression: gender, 'race', and class. By looking at these themes from a historical perspective, I will highlight how gender, 'race', and class privileges threatened the egalitarianism on which libertarian communities are based. Thus, I illustrate how different communities reacted to the pervasiveness of privilege and power relations in different periods and different spatial contexts. Although I will dedicate a section to each of these topics, intersections between them are inevitable as identities of gender, 'race' and class are overlapping and mutually-constituted.⁵³⁴

1. Old habits die hard: Libertarian communities and gender-based power relations

After attending the 2016 Anarchist Studies Network (ASN) international conference in Loughborough, the editors of the Italian anarchist magazine *A-Rivista Anarchica* asked me to write an article to give its Italian readers an overview about the recent trends in anarchist studies. The official topic of that year's conference was anarcha-feminism, although it really encompassed the theme of the struggle of marginalised people against hierarchical gender structures and practices. In particular, 'women, trans and non-binary people, queer activists, collectives, people of colour, people with disabilities'.⁵³⁵ This followed the worries expressed after the previous edition (September 2014) by some participants about the poor participation of women and the

⁵³² de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

⁵³³ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁵³⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142>.

⁵³⁵ Anarchist Studies Network, 'Call for Papers: Anarchist Studies Network Conference', January 2016.

absence of a 'safer space' policy. As a consequence, the 2016 ASN conference opened with the presentation of a draft 'safer space' policy to be discussed and approved during the event.

A definition of 'safer spaces' was provided by the organisers of the first international Anarcha-feminist (AFem) conference in 2014:

By 'safer space' we mean a space where abuse will not be tolerated and abusers will not be welcome. We also mean a space where we all actively work in solidarity with one another against the oppression we find in wider society. We all have some areas in our life with privilege and some without. In areas where you have privilege, this is a time to step back, listen and make space for people who don't. In areas where you don't have privilege, this is the time to claim your space and know that others will have your back. The safer spaces policy discusses how to do this in detail.⁵³⁶

When I started writing the article for *A-Rivista*, I realised that – even though the definition was clear – I was unable to translate the term 'safer space' into Italian. I had never heard of such things in the Italian libertarian/anarchist communities I had visited – although other communities perhaps used it. So, I asked the editorial staff for a possible translation, but they were not aware of similar practices at all.

Clearly, this does not mean that British libertarian communities are 'safer' than their Italian counterparts. Rather, it signifies that the two libertarian movements have reached two different levels of awareness of the dangers of gender privilege within libertarian spaces. Indeed, the organisers of the 2014 AFem conference deemed it necessary to have such a moment of exchange and reflection because they thought: 'our anarchist movement is not truly anarchist', as they denounced 'efforts to shut us down, belittle our ideas, and physically assault and abuse us'. In conclusion, they stated that 'both feminist and anti-oppressive ideas are facing a backlash'.⁵³⁷ Such considerations highlighted the importance of shedding light on the changes that the idea of gender-based privilege has undergone in the period I look at in this chapter, and consequently on how the ideas of what needed protecting and challenging also shifted.

1.1 'Comrades in the streets, fascists in life'? Libertarian communities and Feminism

In his *Sex, Politics and Society*, Jeffrey Weeks wrote that 'the aims of the women's movement and the gay movement were similar: they both offered challenges ... to the rigid categorisation of masculinity and femininity'.⁵³⁸ However, each movement had its own roots, and its national peculiarities. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell affirmed that: 'At regular intervals throughout history, women rediscover themselves – their strengths, their capabilities, their political will'. Within this continuum, historians have identified periods of organised activism for the rights of

⁵³⁶ The AFem Safer Spaces Working Group, 'Safer Spaces Agreement for AFem 2014', *afem2014*, 2 October 2014, <http://afem2014.tumblr.com/post/98976518359/safer-spaces-agreement-for-afem-2014>.

⁵³⁷ AFem organising team, 'What Was AFem2014?', *AFem2014* (blog), 23 October 2014, <https://afem2014.wordpress.com/afem2014-an-anarcha-feminist-conference-in-london-19102014/>.

⁵³⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Society since 1800*, Second Edition (London, New York: Longman, 1989), 285.

women – ‘waves’ of feminism. However, Elizabeth Evans underlined the lack of consensus on the periodisation of feminist ‘waves’ in the history of feminism. On the one hand, academics nowadays agree that first-wave feminism relates to the North American and European movement for women’s suffrage and legal and constitutional rights of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. There is less agreement however on the periodisation of second and third waves. Some scholars, like Baumgardner and Cochrane, even hypothesised the existence of a fourth wave, as either a post-9/11 American response to global inequalities, or a British reaction to the 2010 Conservative party victory.

For the purpose of this chapter, which focuses on the period between the late 1960s and the present day, I will follow the periodisation suggested by Evans; that is second-wave feminism between 1960s and 1980s, with an ongoing third wave from the 1990s. Evans associated the second wave with the activities of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the United States and Great Britain. In that period, feminists sought both to highlight the inequalities within the personal sphere, and to change the laws affecting women especially relating to abortion rights and equal pay.⁵³⁹ These themes later spread from the United States to Italy, where Paul Ginsborg observed the foundation of several US-inspired feminist groups in the 1970s.⁵⁴⁰ This was a movement that in the 1980s found its way into mainstream politics losing some of its radicalism.⁵⁴¹ As a reaction to what academics described as the ‘failure of second-wave feminism’, a third wave took shape. Evans used the definition ‘long third wave’ or even ‘third wave feminisms’ (using the plural form) to identify the feminist movement that formed in 1990s America, and reached Britain in the early 2000s. This was a movement characterised by a multiplicity of identities and campaigns such as a feminist engagement with global social justice agendas and intersectionality, even though white, middle-class, heterosexual women still dominated.⁵⁴² These concerns can be found in the Italian movement too, together with a peculiarity identified by Laura Fantone: a critique of economic precariousness.⁵⁴³

According to Marsha Rowe – co-founder of the British feminist magazine *Spare Rib* – Second-wave ‘Feminism ... was about all the things that now everyone takes for granted’.⁵⁴⁴ This was the case in Italy too, as debates around divorce and abortion helped feminist ideas spread within Italian society.⁵⁴⁵ In this process, the involvement of radical groups was crucial, as the Barese anarchist militant Silvana Donno explained:

Inside institutional parties ... all that concerned women was labelled ‘feminine question’, and they all had a ‘women’s commission’. But they didn’t let women speak for

⁵³⁹ Elizabeth Evans, *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4–7.

⁵⁴⁰ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 366–70.

⁵⁴¹ Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents. 1980-2001* (London: Penguin, 2003), 36, 121–23.

⁵⁴² Evans, *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms*, 19–38.

⁵⁴³ Laura Fantone, ‘Precarious Changes: Gender and Generational Politics in Contemporary Italy’, *Feminist Review*, no. 87 (2007): 5–20.

⁵⁴⁴ Andy Beckett, *When The Lights Went Out. Britain in The Seventies* (London: Faber And Faber, 2009), 209–33.

⁵⁴⁵ Silvio Lanaro, *Storia dell’Italia Repubblicana* (Venice: Marsilio, 1992), 362.

themselves – they spoke in place of the women. Those within the women’s commissions worked on the issues their party had chosen for them – not on what they experienced.⁵⁴⁶

Silvana and other anarchist feminists found instead a way to positively affect the lives of women by participating in libertarian spaces like the *Comitato di Quartiere* San Pasquale (CdQ), which was a neighbourhood committee in the namesake working-class district of Bari. There, recalled another anarchist feminist – Pina Buttiglione – they set up a sort of counter-informative service to take apart what local women believed in. For instance, said Pina, ‘they believed that a civil wedding wasn’t valid ... [and that] you had to actually marry in a church. In fact, they used to tell me: “Watch out! [Yours] isn’t valid!”’.⁵⁴⁷ The neighbourhood committee also hosted a clinic on set days to give working-class women the opportunity to visit for free, and held weekly women-only meetings where they could ‘discuss their problems, ... get to know their body [and] all birth-control systems by seeing their negative and positive effects’.⁵⁴⁸

The situation of the feminists within these libertarian spaces and radical groups was contradictory. They criticised the primacy that most male radicals gave to the revolution, which came before any gender-related issue, and often they also denounced the private conservatism of their male comrades. They created slogans like ‘*Compagni in piazza, fascisti nella vita / con questa ambiguità facciamola finita*’ (Comrades in the streets, fascists in life / let’s end this ambiguity) and also ‘*Non vogliamo essere gli angeli del ciclostile*’ (We don’t want to be the angels of the duplicating machine). The latter was an ironic reference to the old saying that depicted the woman as ‘the angel of the hearth’.⁵⁴⁹ As a reaction to these behaviours, many feminists became ‘separatists’ – they founded women-only groups, collectives, and even squats. However, Pina claimed that the anarchists ‘were less authoritarian than others. I mean, while the other groups [had] authoritarian figures – the idea of a recognised leader – the anarchists didn’t have this. We had a relationship of equality, so we also had less of a need of feminist demands inside the group’.⁵⁵⁰

Of a similar opinion was a former squatter who asked to be called Jude. In the late 1970s, she lived in a squatting community in West London where she felt equally treated, though she did experience gender-based discrimination when she visited a friend who lived in a Welsh commune. There, she claimed, ‘men sat around and smoked dope while women did all the work ... I spent my whole time helping her with the washing, because “that’s just women’s work”’. When she returned to London, she thought: ‘It was a relief to be here because there wasn’t that kind of feeling ... I didn’t feel there was huge discrimination against women. And we had a cooking rota, and everybody signed up for that’. She did add, however, that ‘in these houses it was the women

⁵⁴⁶ Donno, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁵⁴⁷ Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁵⁴⁸ Comitato di quartiere San Pasquale, ‘Bollettino Interno’.

⁵⁴⁹ Lapolla, *Gli anarchici di piazza Umberto. La sinistra libertaria a Bari negli anni Settanta.*, 124.

⁵⁵⁰ Buttiglione, Interview on OAP-ORA.

who mostly did the cleaning ... we did [discuss the issue] but somehow this never changed'.⁵⁵¹ Shelley Assiter's experience was comparable to that of Jude because – although she too was happy with her role as a woman within her own squatting community (Frestonia) – her words revealed more than what she said. Talking of the crèche they had set up for the children of the Frestonia community, she declared there were 'about six of us – six mothers – taking it in turns to look after the kids for the whole day ... and we would have two days off for ourselves. We created a community, and the babies pretty much felt like brothers and sisters'.⁵⁵² The fact that it was only the mothers who took care of the children shows that Shelley's community – like Jude's – sometimes recreated traditional roles for its women.

The situation seemed to remain contradictory in late-1980s and early-1990s London squatting communities, as the former squatter Bibi said:

I saw a lot of people challenging the ideas they'd been brought up with. You had men, who'd been brought up with a strict Catholic upbringing, wearing make-up or spiking their hair, or wearing women's clothes for fun. But, in some other ways, sexist ways were reproduced as well. For example, when I was living with one friend – another woman – we had a lot of young guys [in our squat], and they all seemed to want a mother replacement. They seemed to want for the women to be cooking for them, and they were sitting around drinking. I had a bit of a problem with that ... There were people challenging stereotypes and the way they'd been brought up but, in some way, they fell into the habit of repeating certain stereotypes.⁵⁵³

Despite this, she maintained that 'the women that were there were strong characters – enough to make it feel like it was quite a good place to be female, and a quite enjoyable place to be in, and a community to be part of'.⁵⁵⁴

Carolyn too, found the presence of strong women to be positive and inspiring, especially at Claremont Road. There, she appreciated that: 'There were lots of situations in which you could see women in positions of power and responsibilities, and taking charge of things – breaking the law in the same way or shouting as much and as loudly [as men], and participating very equally'. What was worrying to her was that 'there were still issues about people's personal relationships with each other ... I definitely saw lots of dodgy behaviour between people, sex behaviour, sexual assaults'. Overall, she concluded: 'On a campaign level I don't remember anything happening to address gender as an issue. But maybe for some people gender wasn't an issue – they were too busy and caught-up in the issue of the M11'.⁵⁵⁵ Just like the revolutionaries of the 1970s, some activists prioritised political objectives over gender-related issues. However, the presence of assertive women helped create a space in which other women felt they could speak and act.

⁵⁵¹ Jude, Interview on squatting in London.

⁵⁵² Assiter, Interview on Frestonia.

⁵⁵³ Bibi, Interview on squatting in London.

⁵⁵⁴ Bibi.

⁵⁵⁵ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

The same problems persisted in the 2000s, although a new tendency started emerging – a turn towards a collective feeling that it is everyone’s individual responsibility to challenge gendered privilege. In those years, Alessio Lunghi was involved in several squatting and social centre experiences in London, where:

We were very much alert if there was an issue of people being threatened – men threatening women – because we were an open space during the day. We’d get all sorts of people. It took a lot of affirmative actions to keep people out of abuses towards women. There were also issues in our collective that we had to confront as well – we did ban people from our collective.⁵⁵⁶

With time, this seems to have become a shared tendency among libertarian communities. More recently, Jo has participated in different anarchistic experiences around Britain before entering Bristol-based Kebele social centre around 2013. She told me: ‘I’ve never had an incident in Kebele – which is a real testament to the space – where I’ve felt uncomfortable on the receiving end of gendered violence’. In her opinion:

That is possibly partly because there are a lot of women who are active as volunteers in Kebele, like in the self-defence group, in the bike workshop – these are traditionally groups that have been dominated by men in other anarchist spaces that I’ve been to. In the kitchen as well we have a very good gender-balanced group of volunteers, which is again something I’ve never really encountered ... my experience is that Kebele has a good gender balance across all of its user groups, and maybe that is partly contributing to why I’ve never been on the receiving end of gender violence in the centre.⁵⁵⁷

Jo believed that behind Kebele’s success is probably the ‘good gender balance across all of its user groups’ – that is Kebele’s internal collectives. The higher participation of women suggests that all Kebele activists – men and women – managed to create a space where women feel welcome. Describing various external radical groups using Kebele spaces, Jo said that they ‘tend to have a lot more men than women ... [which can cause] tensions’.⁵⁵⁸

Women currently participating in libertarian communities mentioned the emergence of subtler types of gender-based discrimination/oppression. For instance, even the more progressive activists sometimes unconsciously replicate forms of gendered language. An Ex-Caserma Liberata activist, Carmen, provided an example when she told me: ‘There’s a series of subtler questions involving personal issues – sexual relations, relationships, dislikes – [which] can influence the decisions regarding the management of the space, and its politics’. However, she described the situation in Bari as much worse than in London or Bristol. Since 2010, when she occupied the Ex-Mercato Occupato social centre in Bari, Carmen has attended assemblies for hundreds of hours in which she observed group dynamics that included ‘acts of discrimination

⁵⁵⁶ Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London.

⁵⁵⁷ Jo, Interview on Kebele.

⁵⁵⁸ Jo.

against women, tensions when more than one alpha male was present, the overflowing of personal issues into political problems'. In fact, she claimed: '[I was] a victim myself when I had less awareness about such issues'. In general, though, the collective would convoke an assembly to deal with similar problems. She explained: 'I personally participated in assemblies where these types of episodes were discussed. For example, a member of the collective once silenced a female comrade by telling her: "Go do the washing up!"'. However, this process seems to work, as Carmen clarified that 'no member of a collective can keep acting like this, or he's excluded'.⁵⁵⁹ Carmen said that as a woman she often felt as a second-class activist:

As a woman, I always thought that – had I been a man – comrades would have appreciated my ideas more. Indeed, if they were supported by the male leader, the assembly generally endorsed them. Also, if you're in a relation with somebody inside the collective, it's easy that your mental and decisional faculties are totally delegated to your partner, who becomes the spokesperson for both of you. In order to be heard as a woman in this kind of collective situations, you need a lot of determination – just like in any other situation, I think.⁵⁶⁰

Carmen subscribed to her British counterparts' observation that the presence of strong, determined, vocal women was essential to avoid gender discrimination within libertarian communities. A behaviour that – when present – demonstrates the oppressive mentality of male libertarians. According to Carmen, this is even more important in Italian society 'which is deeply sexist and macho. So, even those with political ideals, and who would like to change the world, often they're not aware of being sexist in their own personal relations'. This is especially the case in a traditional southern Italian city like Bari, which has usually elected a majority of centre-right MPs. She nevertheless concluded that 'the difference between the members of a collective and the people out there is that the former – although not totally free from sexist and macho attitudes – recognise the issues and are available to discuss them with the other members'.⁵⁶¹ I would like to extend this last reflection to include British communities as well: British society is also sexist and many male activists and squatters inevitably absorbed this growing up. This often required affirmative actions and direct confrontations, as Alessio stated.

1.2 Gay/queer movement within and without the libertarian communities

In their call for papers, both the Anarchist Studies Network and Anarcha-Feminist conferences explicitly expressed their interest in both the feminist and gay/queer movements. They described them as overlapping movements of people marginalised by hierarchical structures and practices over gender roles and sexuality. The two movements themselves developed in conversation. Although more recent, the gay liberation movement had a similar trajectory as that of women's liberation, as they both originated in the United States and spread to Europe (though European

⁵⁵⁹ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

⁵⁶⁰ Carmen and Tony.

⁵⁶¹ Carmen and Tony.

roots and influences can be identified too). In addition, the gay movement was inspired by feminism in rhetoric, terms of analysis ('sexism') and political style (small groups, 'consciousness raising'). Weeks clarified that, even though Britain had campaigns to decriminalise 'homosexual acts' since the 1950s, it was only in the 1960s that 'a more sophisticated homosexual subculture' emerged. Then, following the birth of the American gay liberation movement in 1969, The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was founded in London in October 1970.⁵⁶²

In the 1970s, in London and other major cities were founded gay communes, which were practically libertarian communities on their own.⁵⁶³ This was in line with the tendency of squatting communities to behave like self-contained communities, as former squatter Josefine Speyer remembered: they were 'pretty much like different states: You're a part of this state. You don't go too often to that state – but sometimes you do. We were quite in our own world. It was a busy world: people ... [went to parties and] organised events'.⁵⁶⁴ Partly because squatters were too busy to keep records, and partly because squatting communities behaved like separate 'states', it is hard to retrace the type of relations between straight libertarian squatters and gay communes in the 1970s. Behind this separation there are both exogenous and endogenous reasons. Due to the conservativeness of mainstream society, gay people often sought the freedom to express their sexuality in the anonymity of big cities – especially London. Squatting, which was not illegal at the time, provided them with a cheap way to live. However, unlike the separatist feminist women-only squats, these gay communes were less of a political choice. Theirs was a behaviour in line with the tendency of most squatting communities to develop along and around a common identity, as this made cohabitation more enjoyable. Far from being an explicitly politically-motivated project, the squatters I interviewed explained that they simply tended to join people they already knew, or sought other squatters with similar characteristics/interests.

Throughout the 1970s, these communities provided gay people with safe spaces where they could express themselves and experience 'a sense of the absolute validity of homosexuality as a sexual orientation ('Gay is Good'); a belief in the vital importance of being open about one's homosexuality ('Coming Out'); and an emphasis on the importance of collective endeavour, self activity and self-help'.⁵⁶⁵ This last part in particular is what made gay communes a form of libertarian community. In fact, the gay movement developed a close relationship not only with feminism but anarchism too. Lucy Robinson confirms this as she retraces histories of individuals and organisations that united gay liberation and anarchist political positions within the broader context of the post-war British Left. Examples of this are the lives of countercultural figures like singer George Melly (1926-2007) and novelist-journalist Colin MacInness (1914-1976), as well as the foundation of the Gay Activists Alliance in London in 1978 which included anarchist

⁵⁶² Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Society since 1800*, 285.

⁵⁶³ Beckett, *When The Lights Went Out. Britain in The Seventies*, 216–18.

⁵⁶⁴ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁵⁶⁵ Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Society since 1800*, 285.

militants.⁵⁶⁶ The best example of this ‘union’ is however the anarcho-punk movement of 1980s and 1990s. It made an important contribution to advancing the queer cause within the Italian and British libertarian movements alike. Besides participating in the squatting of Claremont Road (East London) to oppose the construction of the M11 link road in the early 1990s, Carolyn also participated in the 121 centre in Brixton, south London, which was a squatted autonomous centre from 1981 to 1999 (before they too began using the term ‘social centre’).⁵⁶⁷ She stated that they ‘had this anarcho-queer group, and these events at 121, and organised all these queer gatherings with hundreds of people turning up’. They had no relationships, however, with the former squatters of the Gay Liberation Front still living in Brixton.⁵⁶⁸ Carolyn’s account finds confirmation in Matt Cook’s analysis of the Brixton gay community that – in the early 1980s – was largely affected by an inevitable process of ageing, as well as by gentrification and a conservative shift in national politics. Yet, he added, ‘there were, though, new gay networks in the area, energized by wider social and cultural change, by different explorations of identity, and by shifts in local gay subcultures’. An example of this was Carolyn’s anarcho-punk queer scene.⁵⁶⁹

This relationship between gay/queer movement and anarchism continued in the following decades as well. Alessio explained that when his anarchist collective opened the first social centres in early-2000s London:

This pre-dated the whole emphasis on safer-spaces culture. We never had a safer-spaces culture – it was something that came out of the queer movement, which was very integrated in the collective as well. The first space that we had in Stoke Newington in 2000, we had a queer night once a week, and a women-only café.⁵⁷⁰

Similarly, Italian social centres provided a platform for the queer movement to meet and socialise, but to increase their political awareness as well, since the themes animating the politics of social centres were often interconnected. Gennaro was an active member of the Fucine Meridionali social centre in Bari (1994-96) when, he recalled:

There were two [gay] comrades who lived together [in a small town nearby], and who’d been threatened more than once by fascists: ‘Fucking faggots! We’ll kill you!’ ... Our political decision was to go to that town – 300 of us – occupy the main square without authorisation to say: ‘These two people are not alone’ ... We held this silent demonstration – without flags and banners – in the streets, and passed by the local fascist headquarters ... We sang a couple of anti-fascist chants ... and then went away. And they stopped being threatened.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁶ Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political*, 45–50, 126.

⁵⁶⁷ ‘Brixton: 121 Centre’, Urban 75, accessed 30 April 2017, <http://www.urban75.org/brixton/features/121.html>.

⁵⁶⁸ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁵⁶⁹ Cook, “‘Gay Times’: Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970’s London”, 20.

⁵⁷⁰ Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London.

⁵⁷¹ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

In this case, the activists of Fucine Meridionali combined anti-homophobia and anti-fascism together in a direct action that mobilised hundreds of sympathisers. A show of force that provided protection to the two gay activists.

Events like these fostered a debate on such themes within the wider radical movement. In Milan in 1988 the people running Calusca radical bookshop and a group of anarcho-punks re-founded the old Conchetta social centre as Cox18. Their political identity as radicals/anarchists now includes a strong anti-homophobic stance, together with anti-fascism, anti-sexism, anti-capitalism, anti-racism and sometimes also anti-specism. However, a former Cox18 activist – Giovanna – said that:

Starting from a mentality in which gays were seen with contempt, Conchetta did a lot of work – it held events on transgenderism, for instance – and now it's an entirely different story. Those were events open to people from the outside, but they also had an impact on the inside – there was a growth from this point of view.⁵⁷²

By organising events and political actions, the libertarian spaces have contributed to raising awareness of people on gay liberation, feminist issues and queer politics. Debates and collective reflections were useful for the libertarian activists too, as libertarian communities are not free from gender-based and homophobic power dynamics. Gender privilege survives among libertarians, and they often end up replicating the mainstream relations they so firmly criticise, as we have seen. This is especially true of their personal lives, being products themselves of the mainstream socio-cultural context.

Activists/libertarians are – Carmen suggested – nevertheless generally more willing to recognise their own limits in order to work on them with their comrades. An example of this type of self-reflective libertarian is Alessio, who stated: 'So, looking back, my behaviour – people's behaviour – was sexist ... I'm not saying we were completely sexist, misogynistic, abusive people. It's more – we could have been a lot better'.⁵⁷³ In fact, the libertarian communities I have investigated – with all their limitations – still presented a more progressive approach towards these themes than we see in mainstream British and Italian society. Rather than a homogenous national trend, what emerged from my analysis is that the three movements (gay/queer, feminist, and anarchist/libertarian) have developed a mutually-influential relationship. Their shared interest in the liberation of the individual – although from different perspectives – has led to an increasingly intertwined connection. Overcoming the single-issue communities typical of the 1970s – such as gay or women-only squats – this has produced spaces in which the three movements coexist and enrich each other.

⁵⁷² Giovanna, Interview on Cox 18, 26 January 2015.

⁵⁷³ Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London.

2. Service providers or white leadership? Libertarian communities and ethnic minorities

My first memory of migrants was the televised image of the Vlora ship docking in the port of Bari in August 1991. I was seven years old. I had probably seen other migrants before then, especially street sellers, but that was the first time I witnessed such large-scale scenes of desperation: a rusty cargo ship overcrowded with over 20,000 Albanians – many fainting because of hunger and heat, or diving into the dirty waters of the port to find some relief. They sought the ‘Italian dream’ after the fall of the communist regime. These shocking scenes would soon be overshadowed by the aerial images of the same people locked inside the old football stadium of Bari, without a shelter, with the police throwing food and water from a fire-engine ladder, ‘as they do in the zoos with wild beasts’.⁵⁷⁴

Unlike other European countries, and especially those with large former colonial empires, Italy was still new to the phenomenon of large-scale immigration. In Britain there was a longstanding history of migration, and after the Second World War large number of people from former colonies arrived to meet the demand for labour. To a first wave of mass-migration from the Caribbean countries in the 1950s and early 1960s, followed a second wave from the Indian subcontinent in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁷⁵ However, after an initial ‘open door’ policy inaugurated with the British Nationality Act of 1948, subsequent Acts (1962, 1968 and 1971) placed tighter controls on immigration, and even promoted discrimination. The 1971 Immigration Act, for example, effectively discriminated against Blacks and Asians as it reserved the right to automatic entry and residence to individuals with a direct family tie to Britain – mostly from the ‘white’ Commonwealth of Canada and Australasia.⁵⁷⁶ Historian Tony Kushner identified this institutional discrimination as the factor that legitimised the spreading racism in the British society in this period.⁵⁷⁷

Racism in Italy meanwhile was mostly an ‘internal affair’.⁵⁷⁸ Italy had long been an exporter of labour, and it was only in the 1980s and 1990s that this trend reversed. Before then, observed Paul Ginsborg: ‘the Italian population had been extraordinarily homogeneous – in colour of skin, religion, even increasingly in language. It was, in racial terms, deeply conservative, and was quite unprepared for, and hostile to, the idea of a multi-ethnic Italy’.⁵⁷⁹ Another ‘racial’ divide, though, had characterised Italy before the arrival of foreigners – that between northerners and southerners. When the 1960s ‘economic miracle’ attracted masses of southerners towards the

⁵⁷⁴ Luigi Quaranta, ‘E 20mila Disperati Finirono Prigionieri: Lo Sbarco Della Vlora Venti Anni Fa’, *Corriere Del Mezzogiorno*, 5 August 2011, <http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/napoli/notizie/cronaca/2011/5-agosto-2011/20mila-disperati-finirono-prigionieri-lo-sbarco-vlora-venti-anni-fa-1901243680065.shtml>.

⁵⁷⁵ E. J. B. Rose, ‘Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations’ (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1969), 83.

⁵⁷⁶ Nicholas Abercrombie and Alan Warde, *Contemporary British Society*, Third (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 228–33.

⁵⁷⁷ Tony Kushner, ‘Immigration and “Race Relations”’, in *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, ed. Paul Johnson (London, New York: Longman, 1995), 419.

⁵⁷⁸ Italy did experience colonialism between late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, and produced forms of both institutional and popular racism against foreigners. However, due to the small number of foreigners in Italy in the period at the centre of my analysis, most affected by ‘racial’ discrimination were southern Italians.

⁵⁷⁹ Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents. 1980-2001*, 64.

industrial cities of the north, they found widespread racist attitudes, like reserving flats for rent ‘only to non-southerners’.⁵⁸⁰

2.1 From southerners to extracomunitari: Italian libertarians politicising migrants

One hundred years after the assimilation of the Kingdom of Naples to create a unified Italy (1861), southern Italians were still treated as foreigners. Their situation improved only partially in the 1970s. Many residents in the derelict and overcrowded areas of industrial cities – like the Ticinese district of Milan – were southern migrants. In 1976, families of southerners were among the first occupiers of Ticinese-based Conchetta and Torricelli squats, which also hosted anarchist social centres on their ground floors.⁵⁸¹ Pino is an anarchist militant from Matera – in southern Italy – and one of the first to squat Torricelli, where he recalls a deep cooperation among the squatters to (self)manage the place. Both the squatters (including their families from southern Italy) and the militants of the organisations using those spaces met in Conchetta and Torricelli’s joint assemblies.⁵⁸²

When in 1988 punks re-founded the semi-disused Conchetta as Cox18, Ticinese was undergoing a process of gentrification – many of the second-generation migrants from the south and newly-arrived southerners had been pushed towards the outskirts of Milan. Giovanna had just arrived in Milan from Sicily in 1988 when she learned about Cox18 and started frequenting the place. She noticed how many of the activists were in fact young people from ‘the southern area [of Milan] – those rough neighbourhoods, where the city had nothing to offer. They came to Conchetta looking for social relations’. Among them were ‘immigrants from the south’, like her. It was not fun for fun’s sake, there. The young visitors of Cox18 came to socialise ‘but then increased [their political] awareness ... some messages were delivered through the events we had there’.⁵⁸³ While the internal migrants seemed to blend into Milanese counterculture without a problem, the first foreign migrants had more difficulties. Giovanna told me of the first migrant regular at Cox18 she had memory of – a Moroccan selling smuggled cigarettes: ‘Sometimes, he kept his wares here to avoid running risks, but everybody was OK with this because he didn’t bother the others ... Later, we had people who came here and thought this could be a dealing place. So they were kicked the fuck out’.⁵⁸⁴ When talking of foreign migrants, Giovanna did not speak of cooperation or politicisation of the migrants, as she and Pino had done with southern migrants. In this case, Giovanna hinted at the possibility of a coexistence between Italian activists and migrants when the latter caused no problems to the former.

In southern cities like Bari, the regular presence of migrants is an even more recent event. Although thousands of Albanians arrived in the early 1990s, most of them were either sent back

⁵⁸⁰ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 225.

⁵⁸¹ Editorial Staff, ‘Occupazioni Di Case E Scambio Libero’.

⁵⁸² Pino, Interview on Milan social centres.

⁵⁸³ Giovanna, Interview on Cox 18.

⁵⁸⁴ Giovanna.

to Albania or managed to disperse through Italy and abroad. The sight of migrants begging or roaming the city became increasingly common after the opening of centres for the identification and detention of migrants on the outskirts of Bari in the early 2000s. This happened as economic crises and post-9/11 wars on terror increased the number of people attempting to cross the Mediterranean by boat.⁵⁸⁵ With the increase in the number of migrants coming to Italy, the level of xenophobia in the Italian population grew. In 2011, after the so-called Arab Spring, Carmen and her comrades had just abandoned the Ex-Mercato Occupato social centre due to divergences with the squatting component, and were searching for people with whom to occupy a new property. They finally met four homeless families (two Italian and two migrant) and several individuals (including one from Tunisia). Together they turned an abandoned school into the Villa Roth squat and social centre. There, Carmen recounted: ‘We managed to involve the migrant families’, who became an integral part of the community. ‘The kids of the migrant families were basically our own children ... We raised them. They grew up attending our events’.⁵⁸⁶

In the same period, another former school (Ex-Socrate) and an ex-hotel in Bari had been squatted by African migrants with the help of local radical activists. In all three instances the activists strove to politicise the migrants by helping them self-organise, teaching them their rights, and involving them in political events. The libertarian principles of self-organisation and direct action were central to this. This is well represented by a statement released by the Ex-Socrate collective, who openly declined any ‘attempt to represent the migrants, unlike some anti-racists who want just to increase their influence on the institutions in order to win funds’.⁵⁸⁷ The second part of the statement is an open attack on the reformist Left that, in their opinion, uses anti-racist struggles not to empower migrants but to gain political power and money.

In 2014, parts of the activist groups of Ex-Socrate and Villa Roth united to occupy Ex-Caserma Liberata. Environmental activist Frank distanced himself from Ex-Caserma after initially trying to cooperate with them. While talking of his brief experience there, he spoke of: “‘Camped-out” foreigners, who go there not to participate, but simply to have a place to live. People say they go there just to drink and smoke, which I’ve noticed myself, by the way’.⁵⁸⁸ What I translated as ‘foreigners’, he called ‘*extracomunitari*’, which literally means non-EU citizens, but commonly indicates people of colour and/or people from developing countries. Although I have only visited Ex-Caserma a few times, I can confirm that I never saw *extracomunitari* involved in the active management of the social centre collective or taking part in any event or meeting I went to (unlike the southern migrants in 1970s Milan). What differentiates Ex-Caserma from Villa Roth and Ex-Socrate is that migrants lived in the squatted areas of the last two social

⁵⁸⁵ Rete No CPT, ‘CPT: Riapre Centro Di Bari Palese’, 10 June 2005, <http://www.meltingpot.org/CPT-riapre-centro-di-Bari-Palese.html>.

⁵⁸⁶ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

⁵⁸⁷ Socrate Occupato Bari, ‘Ex Socrate: Una Lotta Autorganizzata per I Diritti. Per Un’antirazzismo Coerente E Senza Fini Di Lucro’, *Socrate Occupato Bari* (blog), 30 January 2010, <https://socrateoccupatobari.noblogs.org/post/2010/01/30/ex-socrate-una-lotta-autorganizzata-per-i-diritti-per-un%e2%80%99antirazzismo-coerente-e-senza-fini-di-lucro/>.

⁵⁸⁸ Frank, Interview on Ex-Caserma Liberata.

centres. This meant they were more immediately involved. In all three cases, however, the role of the migrants remained secondary. Their participation usually followed the organisational effort of the Barese militants, who thus maintained an unwillingly leading role. Communication difficulties and different cultural backgrounds certainly hindered their participation – revealing the pervasiveness of power relations.

2.2 British libertarian communities: A largely white movement in a multi-cultural society

Being born and raised in Bari, the absence of an ethnically diverse collective at Ex-Caserma did not surprise me. What struck me was that I found no activists from ethnic minorities in Bristol's Kebele social centre – as I discussed in Chapter Two. As I have suggested, this was particularly surprising because Kebele is situated in the multi-cultural area of Easton. Not only did I not see people from ethnic minorities among Kebele members, but my interviewees also told me that very few participated in Kebele's political events. This was evidently in tension with one of Kebele's aims and objectives in their official mission statement as a cooperative: 'To provide a space that is welcoming to everyone irrespective of their ethnicity, colour, age, ability, gender or sexual orientation; and to actively work to break down barriers between people'.⁵⁸⁹ Tim – formerly involved in Kebele – told me that local residents would mostly frequent two spaces of Kebele: the café on the ground floor, and the bike workshop active on Wednesdays. In fact, he said: 'The only time that Kebele has a minority of white faces and more non-white faces is the bike workshop on Wednesdays', when visitors 'with their broken bikes are nearly exclusively Somali and Afro-Caribbean and Asian kids from the age of eight up, and wanna be shown how to get it fixed 'cause they can't afford a new bike'.⁵⁹⁰ And Barry, still involved in Kebele, confirmed:

The bike workshop attracts a very different crowd. That is, I would say, the most well-used aspect of Kebele by the local community – loads of people of colour, young Somali kids, getting their bikes fixed and learning how to fix their bikes ... The café is really mixed ... To be honest, for the area where Kebele is situated, it's much more white – the people that come to Kebele – than I would like.⁵⁹¹

Kebele activists were therefore aware of the issue that sees non-white people mainly using the space marginally, and fundamentally to satisfy their particular needs, rather than becoming involved or politicised.

No interviewee at Kebele (all white British activists) could provide a reason for this situation. Tim claimed that they made every effort to increase the number of local residents using the social centre, but with little success. For instance, they organised an open day in 2015, but he claimed he could see only:

⁵⁸⁹ Kebele collective, 'Kebele Community Co-Operative's Mission, Aims and Objectives'.

⁵⁹⁰ Tim, Interview on Kebele.

⁵⁹¹ Barry, Interview on Kebele.

Half a dozen people who'd never been to Kebele before, but we put fliers through three thousand letter boxes ... within Easton ... so, is it people just don't agree with us? Or is it they're so demoralised and alienated that they don't even think about it? Or were they all busy doing other things, taking kids to the park, shopping?⁵⁹²

Kebele activists had carried out no real analysis of the problem, and seemed rather resigned to this situation. In fact, Tim commented bitterly: 'It's fundamentally true that the anarchist movement in Britain is largely white, and that's a problem they've never quite resolved'.⁵⁹³ This is true for the Italian libertarian movement as well.

The anarchist movement originated historically in Europe, and later spread principally to the American continent via and among European migrants. Therefore, the marginal involvement of people with other ethnic and religious backgrounds is a common trait in the libertarian/anarchist movement transnationally. Some black anarchists tried to address the issue in the 1990s, as in the case of Nigerian anarchists Sam Mbah and I. E. Igariwey, who wrote their book *African anarchism* 'to enrich anarchism and anarchist principles with an African perspective, and to carve out a place for Africa within the framework of the worldwide anarchist movement'.⁵⁹⁴ Former US Black Panther Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin preferred instead to 'enrich anarchism' with a new cultural/ethnic perspective. Although an anarchist himself, he wrote a pamphlet to inspire 'a national anti-racist and anti-cop brutality federation, which would be ... heavily participated in by Anarchists'. He considered the North American anarchist movement too 'overwhelmingly white' to attract 'Black, Hispanic and other non-white workers'. Thus, he admitted: 'I thought that if a serious, respected libertarian revolutionary put these ideas forth they would be more likely to be considered than just by a white Anarchist, no matter how well motivated'.⁵⁹⁵

From these examples, two possible reasons emerge for the lack of interest of non-white people in the libertarian movement and communities. Firstly, the simple absence of 'Black, Hispanic and other non-white workers' might be off-putting in itself, making such minorities feel unwelcome in those spaces. Hence Ervin's attempt to use his own role as a black revolutionary to attract possible activists from various ethnic minorities. Secondly, Mbah and Igariwey exposed the failure of the libertarian movement to address themes of interest to ethnic minorities. This latter analysis is supported by Carolyn too. When she was squatting in south London, she came in contact with the local Afro-Caribbean community of Brixton, but they had little interest and involvement in the events of Claremont Road. A behaviour that she found completely justifiable: 'for the black people I knew in Brixton, taking part in an environmental protest – like the M11 or

⁵⁹² Tim, Interview on Kebele.

⁵⁹³ Tim.

⁵⁹⁴ Sam Mbah and I. E. Igariwey, *African Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 1997), iii.

⁵⁹⁵ Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, 'Anarchism and the Black Revolution', The Anarchist Library, 1993, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/lorenzo-kom-boa-ervin-anarchism-and-the-black-revolution#toc33>.

any anti-road protest – is like a luxury that you only do when you haven't got to worry about the police oppression'. In fact, she added: 'that's what they campaigned [against] more'.⁵⁹⁶ In other words, a main cause for the lack of integration between libertarian groups and non-white communities was differing priorities.

Entire squatted neighbourhoods were a common feature in 1970s London, where squatting communities with their own identity took shape. Then too a real integration of the ethnic minorities remained uncommon. An example is the squatting community around the Prince of Wales Crescent area (Camden, north London), where former squatter Mary Finnigan lived. She said: 'It was racially very mixed – Indian origin, all that – but predominantly white middle-class. But I didn't know everybody because it was such a big, diverse community'.⁵⁹⁷ Mary's vague description of what made her community 'mixed' and 'diverse' ('Indian origin, all that', 'I didn't know everybody because it was ... big') denotes at best a superficial interaction between the ethnic groups squatting in the area. In fact, Stropky Old Git – another former squatter, and also member of the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) for decades – claimed: 'With loads of exceptions, I think we have to recognise that squatting was whiter than the population on average. Lots of squats were totally white'. Then, next to these 'totally white' squats, there were some squatting communities that were the expression of one ethnic minority. 'There was', Stropky Old Git said, 'lots of rasta squatting in Brixton – a lot of 'em very hard-core rastas, not just "lifestyle" rastas, very "heavy-duty" ones'.⁵⁹⁸

This lack of full integration between squatting communities, and the appearance of ethnic enclaves, have clear historical causes. They date back to the post-war arrival of migrants, and the following climate of racial tensions legitimised by institutional discriminations. Such a climate emerged also from Steve Platt's account of the squatting movement in 1970s Britain: In the East End of London continuing racial violence forced Asian families to leave council flats on estates where they were often the only non-white residents'. He reported the story of a family which had arrived in Britain in 1973, and were housed in a council flat in Tower Hamlets (East London). After several episodes of both verbal and physical aggressions, they:

finally decided to join several hundred other Bengali families who had already fled council flats for the security of squats in the predominantly Asian district of Spitalfields. They were aided by Tower Hamlets Squatters Union and the Bengali Housing Action Group which opened up several blocks to cope with the demand. At its height, one of these, Pelham Buildings, had almost 200 families squatting in it.⁵⁹⁹

Hence, it was the need for security – besides the transversal need for shelter – what pushed some ethnic minority communities towards squatting, rather than the possibility of experimenting with

⁵⁹⁶ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁵⁹⁷ Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London.

⁵⁹⁸ Stropky Old Git, Interview on squatting in London.

⁵⁹⁹ Steve Platt, 'Here There and Everywhere', in *Squatting. The Real Story*, ed. Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar (London: Bay Leaf, 1980), 40, 41.

libertarian lifestyles. In addition to this, Stroppy Old Git underlined that: ‘In the case of the Bengali Housing Action Group [BHAG], it was a bit more separate. Really because of language, in those days’.⁶⁰⁰ Their interaction with other communities, neighbouring residents, and even institutions had to be mediated by people like Terry Fitzpatrick, founder of the BHAG in 1976. Fitzpatrick – a former squatter in East London, and an anti-fascist and anti-racist activist – helped many Bengali families occupy empty flats, and ‘put down deep roots in the community’. By squatting empty properties to house the Bengali families, Fitzpatrick tackled issues that affected them directly, rather than imposing an external ‘radical’ agenda on them. His experience directly addressed the issue illustrated by Mbah and Igariwey. He bridged the longstanding gap between radicals and ethnic minorities, and introduced them to forms of radical/libertarian tactics like direct action and self-management. Yet, he admitted in an interview:

As a campaign we ran out of steam. There was no more empty property, also the core group was absolutely exhausted. It was seven days a week. There were splits and arguments in the group, because BHAG had become a centre of power. A lot of Bangladeshis didn’t like to see non-Bangladeshis in the leadership of it. We never intended it to happen, but it just happened.⁶⁰¹

Despite all their efforts, the integration between ethnic minorities and largely white activists remained problematic. The situation has not improved in the following decades. Contemporary social centres have overcome the separation of women-only and gay communes typical of the 1970s, thus becoming spaces where people with different identifications can interact and enrich each other – although with some issues. What hinders a similar interaction in terms of ethnicity are various factors such as linguistic difficulties, the pre-existing whiteness of the movement, and different priorities. BHAG overcame all three factors because white activists like Fitzpatrick prioritised the Bangladeshis and their needs. Facilitating this was the fact that white and non-white East London residents shared similar housing problems. BHAG nevertheless failed in the long run due to two recurring limitations of many radical groups: activists’ burnout due to their limited numbers, and the tendency to take the leadership when campaigning with and for people in need of help. Although often involuntary, as in the case of BHAG, the latter issue is particularly problematic in the relationship between radicals and ethnic minorities.

When this happens, the activists risk ending up replicating the power dynamics of the mainstream society they criticise. This is precisely what happened in the Barese social centres of early 2010s, where migrants were at best passively involved under the leadership of white activists; or what is happening at Kebele, where the local young Somalis use the libertarian community as a provider of services like the bike workshop. The recent example of Black Lives Matter/Plane Stupid action in London shows that this issue is particularly widespread among

⁶⁰⁰ Stroppy Old Git, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶⁰¹ Jamil Iqbal, ‘Oral History Project Interview: Mr Terry Fitzpatrick’, Swadhinata Trust, 1 June 2006, http://www.swadhinata.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173&Itemid=205.

radicals. On 6 September 2016 nine Black Lives Matter activists occupied the City airport runway to protest against the impact of air pollution on black people. Black Lives Matter UK supported the action claiming that ‘climate crisis is a racist crisis’ because ‘Black people are the first to die, not the first to fly, in this racist climate crisis’.⁶⁰² However, other anti-racist campaigners branded the action as ‘cultural appropriation’ when they found out that eight out of nine protesters were white.⁶⁰³

3. A class of their own: Libertarian communities and class-related issues

I first moved to Britain to work as a foreign language assistant in a secondary school and then took my qualification to become a teacher. Coming from Italy, I found school uniforms to be a direct attack on the right of every teenager to express their individual personality through their choice of clothes. In Italy there are no school uniforms for middle and secondary school pupils, whereas kindergarten and primary school children can be asked to wear a smock. My colleagues, though, defended the role of uniforms for two reasons – they apparently helped settling down the pupils, and also levelled socio-economic differences. On my first non-uniform day I ascertained the truthfulness of the former claim, as the children behaved like animals who had just regained freedom after a prolonged captivity. Regarding the latter, I initially thought it to be true. After some time, though, I started noticing some differences. Some pupils had brand-new looking uniforms and a full school equipment, whereas others turned up with torn-up blazers and not even a pen. This is of course not a reliable way of establishing a person’s socio-economic situation, but it can raise some doubts when the child with a torn uniform claims: ‘Mum said we can’t buy a new one’. As my knowledge of the English linguistic varieties improved I discovered pupils’ use of language was a further way of undermining the illusory class levelling of school uniforms.⁶⁰⁴ Such experiences introduced me to the ambiguous ways in which social classes operate within British society. Here, I will look at how classes operate within libertarian communities.

3.1. Class awareness of libertarian communities

I found the idea of ‘class’ ambiguous – but then so did many of my interviewees. My uncertainty endured despite my wide reading on social class. Sociologist Ivan Reid described social class as ‘a grouping of people into categories on the basis of occupation’, although he recognised that ‘social class is [not] simply or only based on occupation’.⁶⁰⁵ Eric Hobsbawm claimed that, even

⁶⁰² Matthew Weaver and Jamie Grierson, ‘Black Lives Matter Protest Stops Flights at London City Airport’, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2016, sec. UK news, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/06/black-lives-matter-protesters-occupy-london-city-airport-runway>.

⁶⁰³ Jamie Grierson, ‘Black Lives Matter Activists Admit Trespass after City Airport Protest’, *The Guardian*, 14 September 2016, sec. UK news, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/14/city-airport-protesters-plead-guilty-trespassing-black-lives-matter>.

⁶⁰⁴ Basil Bernstein, ‘Language and Social Class’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 3 (1960): 271–76. On the way in which class is expressed and conceived through language among schoolboys, see also: Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix, and Rob Pattman, *Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁶⁰⁵ Ivan Reid, *Class in Britain* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 10.

though classes ‘have existed ever since the break-up of a society based essentially on kinship’, “‘Class’ in the full sense only comes into existence at the historical moment when classes begin to acquire consciousness of themselves as such’.⁶⁰⁶ E. P. Thompson reached a similar conclusion, though he denied the objective existence of classes, which he saw as ‘a relationship, and not a thing’:

If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men [sic] over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men [sic] as they live their own history.⁶⁰⁷

Jon Lawrence reflected on perceptions of class in his analysis of a 1960s study on car workers. He demonstrated that the results of that study were conditioned by the pre-existing and conformist class conceptions of both academics and workers.⁶⁰⁸ In fact, the perception and negotiation of class can depend on class itself, and it can vary across time and space.⁶⁰⁹ So, what does constitute a social class for somebody living or participating in a libertarian community? Is it their class of origin or their current socio-economic condition what counts? Also, do they actually reason and live in terms of ‘classes’?

I decided to focus on the usage of ‘class’ by my interviewees and noticed that three patterns emerged. Firstly, Britons seemed less incline to talk of social classes. Secondly, older activists/squatters generally had fewer problems using the terms, whereas the younger ones questioned them. They preferred to identify with other aspects of their identity, such as gay/queer or feminist – as I have briefly illustrated in the previous sections, and will analyse in more depth in the next chapter. This is a behaviour that is revealing of how the analyses – or simply the vocabulary – circulating within the wider libertarian movement affects individuals and groups. Hence, the variations in the use of ‘class’ reflects the changes in the social perception of the term in the last fifty years. This has been a period in which worldwide neoliberal capitalism gradually undermined the very idea of class by fostering precarity and competitive individualism.⁶¹⁰ I did speak with some current activists who employed a class-based analysis of society. This led me to my third observation, as – even though individuals and communities often reflected the broader ‘Zeitgeist’ – adopting a terminology of class revealed their own political mindset. Thus, a present-day militant communist will talk of classes, while a 1970s hippy could find that artificial. We find

⁶⁰⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Class Consciousness in History’, in *Identities. Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, ed. Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 127, 126.

⁶⁰⁷ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 10.

⁶⁰⁸ Jon Lawrence, ‘Social-Science Encounters and the Negotiation of Difference in Early 1960s England’, *History Workshop Journal* 77, no. 1 (1 April 2014): 215–39.

⁶⁰⁹ For an introduction to the historical changes and debates around to the idea of class, see: Anthony Giddens and David Held, eds., *Classes, Power, and Conflict* (London, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983); Stephen Edgell, *Class* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993); Patrick Joyce, ed., *Class* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁶¹⁰ David Neilson, ‘Class, Precarity, and Anxiety under Neoliberal Global Capitalism: From Denial to Resistance’, *Theory & Psychology* 25, no. 2 (2015): 197.

examples of this latter pattern with Shelley and Gennaro. When Shelley, who lived in Frestonia in the late 1970s, described her community, she said:

It was a community that was created out of need, so anybody was welcome. I was part of the hippie core – that was very much my lifestyle and everything – and there were quite a few of us, but there were others. There were people with mental health issues that we took in and were really looked after ... we had alcoholics that died of alcohol, we had drug addicts. It was a microcosmos.⁶¹¹

In her description Shelley overlooked any reference to possible classes, using instead alternative social categories. On the other hand, Gennaro – currently part of Ex-Caserma Liberata social centre – repeatedly used terms like '*proletario*' (proletarian, working-class) and '*sottoproletario*' (lumpenproletarian) to describe the composition of local neighbourhoods and social centres.⁶¹² Though widespread in the radical movement of the 1970s, these terms are now less common – especially in Britain – as they convey a specific political meaning of class struggle.

In 1970s Italy, this highly-politicised jargon was extremely common among radicals, as common was the interest of the radicals involved in libertarian communities into class struggle. In the late 1970s, an example of these communities was the San Pasquale neighbourhood committee in Bari. Anarchist communists were particularly active in the committee, which they saw a 'mass organisation' – a local organisation operating among the working class. Mass organisations were, together with the political group ('specific organisation') at the centre of their politics. They aimed at:

the simultaneous action of both a specific anarcho-communist organisation and a proletarian mass organisation in order to realise the unity, autonomy, class consciousness and internationalism for the construction of anarchist communism ... The specific organisation is characterised by its theoretic and strategic unity, tactical homogeneity and un-contradictory nature. It is composed of militants who are fully responsible towards the organisation. ... The mass organisation, autonomous and proletarian, is the strategic objective that the proletariat sets for itself in order to facilitate and to realise, through it and in conjunction with the specific org[anisation], the social revolution.⁶¹³

CdQ San Pasquale was indeed a working-class area, and – since they saw themselves as 'the most conscientious part of the proletariat' – they wanted to do politics amidst and with working class people. By doing so, they believed they could 'help proletarians raise their [class] consciousness without ever taking the place of the proletariat, which is the only subject of the class struggle'.⁶¹⁴ Their adoption of the label as 'the most conscientious part of the proletariat' shows that – in spite of the class of origin of the individual activists – they became 'proletarian' as a whole by applying platformism.

⁶¹¹ Assiter, Interview on Frestonia.

⁶¹² Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

⁶¹³ Convegno Nazionale dei Lavoratori Anarchici, 'I CNLA Bulletin'.

⁶¹⁴ Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese, 'Lotta Di Classe Nel Quartiere', 15.

In the same period, in London, Ian Dixon was ‘involved in taking over [empty] houses, opening them up and getting the families in’. An activity similar to that of Fitzpatrick for the Bangladeshi community, but aiming at housing working-class people rather than a specific ethnicity/nationality. Ian and his comrades, although politicised, did not aim at raising the class consciousness of those homeless families. In fact, he said:

We realised that many of us were from a middle-class background, and to start telling them they should believe this or that, we felt hesitant about doing that. In a way it was good, because some middle-class radicals get very arrogant and start telling people: ‘Oh, you should believe in this, you should be doing this’, but we didn’t want to do that. we didn’t have seminars. We talked to people ... most of the time they supported us and were grateful for the housing they got, and some – some – did get politicised, but it was a minority.⁶¹⁵

Unlike the Barese anarcho-communists, Ian and his group acknowledged their class background, and did not try to claim a new class identity. Other times, though, a form of class-based identity was imposed on the community from the outside. Jude, for example, was a squatter in West London, where:

Everybody smoked and dadada, and we had several raids in here. In fact, one raid, I was in the room here by the door, and my son – he was four at the time – put a coat over his head and sat there the whole time when they were in here. So I said to the policeman: ‘Look, how would you like it if somebody broke into your house?!’. And he said: ‘Oh, we come in here ‘cause we know you’re middle class, and we know you won’t give us trouble’.⁶¹⁶

The police had classified Jude’s community as harmless, middle-class squatters, and had forced this label on them. Whether imposed from the outside, or chosen by the community itself, these class-based collective identities and presumptions formed in relation to other sub/countercultural communities, as well as to the mainstream.

3.2 Libertarian communities as classless societies?

Does it really make sense to talk of ‘classes’ when we think of people at the edge of mainstream society? Recalling her experience in Frestonia, Shelley said:

Being squatters, we were like the lowest of the lowest in the social context. Even those who we call the gipsies, who were the tinkers really – they’re not proper gipsies, but they live gipsy lives – who had a big community under the flyover down here, they treated us like we were scum, and they were really terrorising us. They were aggressive and we were scared of them. When you look at the social structure of things, they are normally the ones to be the most abused by the rest of society, but – for them – they could tread on us.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ Dixon, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶¹⁶ Jude, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶¹⁷ Assiter, Interview on Frestonia.

By being more abused than the people they considered to be the most abused, Frestonia squatters felt ‘like the lowest of the lowest in the social context’. Once again, the relation with outsiders provided a whole community with a collective identity. In this case, identity was not class-based and the community was not related to a specific place but to a whole category – squatters.

Former squatter Tom Osborn pushed this thought even further, and envisioned squatting as the model for a classless society. He hypothesised in *Squatting: The real story* that: ‘In becoming squatters, people begin to change the nature of their relationships with one another. They take some steps out of their old class position, not merely into another but towards a classless society’.⁶¹⁸ Similarly, some people from the 1970s gay squatting community of Brixton tried to distance themselves from the culture of class by claiming to be ‘*déclassé*’.⁶¹⁹ Osborn’s proposal revolves around the idea that people can step ‘out of their old class position’ by changing ‘the nature of their relationships with one another’. After all, this is what happens in all libertarian communities, as I have illustrated in the previous chapters. Libertarian squatters/activists refuse the relational models of the mainstream, and experiment with alternative forms such as consensus, direct action, and mutual aid. Carolyn seemed to confirm Osborn’s hypothesis when she described the squatting community of Claremont Road:

A lot of people would either live a very alternative lifestyle before they came to Claremont Road – they definitely were by the time they left. People lived in vehicles, in squats, went to free festivals, were maybe involved in other land projects or alternative spaces and quite happy to live outside or in opposition to mainstream culture. When people choose to do that, they sort of sidestep off the conventional class structure or they end up in this sort of extra-class off to the edge.⁶²⁰

However, she then concluded: ‘Within that there might still be differences caused by people’s economic situation or levels of wealth security’. Even though people with affluent backgrounds sometimes renounced their wealth on moral or political grounds, they still benefited from a potential advantage. In Frestonia, Josefine Speyer squatted with her late husband Nick Albery – a key figure in 1970s London’s counterculture. Of him, she said he ‘had a wealthy family, but he didn’t want to live as a wealthy person’. However, (pre-)existing economic and social privileges made the difference in the long run. Their friends, whom she described as ‘very highly-educated artist dropouts’, eventually ended up setting up ‘their own businesses’. In addition, she concluded: ‘The most-middle class of us left, and the others – the less privileged – stayed’.⁶²¹

This was a pattern that journalist and former squatter Mary Finnigan also recognised. She believes that ‘the “norm” – the way we are supposed to live – tends to prevail’. According to her, this happened because ‘most people want to live that comfortable bourgeois life – that’s what we

⁶¹⁸ Osborn, ‘Outpost of a New Culture’, 186.

⁶¹⁹ Cook, “‘Gay Times’: Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970’s London”, 12.

⁶²⁰ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁶²¹ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

seem to like doing. Or what we have been conditioned to do'. In fact, she concluded: 'Most of us were youthfully idealistic, and eventually settled into another way of life'.⁶²² Not all squatters had an economic 'safety net' or a qualification, however, so the opportunities to 'move on' were uneven. John, who used to squat in London in the same period, recalled finding out 'that some people had another house to go to'; 'class divisions ran all the way through [squatting communities]', he said.⁶²³ This transition between counterculture and mainstream was often facilitated by the recognised status of squatting in Britain at that time. Mary recalled that, on Prince of Wales Road, there were people who would start businesses by registering their company at their squatting address. This would have not been possible in Italy, where squatting has always been illegal. Others, like Mary herself, would mainly squat in order to save money, and then conduct a life halfway between the two world:

There was a lot of community politics and there was a lot of abrasive stuff, and was also some very entertaining things happening – a lot of good fun and many parties. I had a wonderful time when I was there! I had more disposable income when I was living [there] than I had in the rest of my life, 'cause I wasn't paying for anything except for my phone bills and the car ... I was already an established journalist, so I didn't have any trouble finding work.⁶²⁴

This was quite common at the time, as Stroppey Old Git – for years a squatter himself and also a member of the Advisory Service for Squatters – confirmed: 'Many squatters worked for local councils and hospitals and [others were] teachers [or worked in] libraries'.⁶²⁵ Similarly, in 1970s Milan, many of the initial occupiers of the Conchetta and Torricelli squats/social centres worked for the local hospital. Although still illegal, such practices were common in that period because squats and social centres were numerous.

Sharing the same political belief and work/study status was often a cohesive factor for the libertarian communities, as in the case of Torricelli's hospital workers. This produced more or less socio-economically homogenous communities. This helped avoid tensions over possible economic privilege. In London there were often communities of artists and students – Josefine told me that in the 1970s: 'Practically everybody I knew lived in squats – practically everybody I knew was either a student or an artist'. In particular, she mentioned:

Haverstock Hill squat – they were actors, so you could say it was the acting squat. Then there was Ealing – it was full of psychotherapists and all their friends. They were training psychotherapists and lived by Ealing common ... and the Shalimar Gardens squat, another big squat, it was beautiful houses side by side, and everybody who lived there was training where I trained to become a psychotherapist ... Practically everybody on my training course was living in a squat. Any money you had you needed to live or to pay the course. You couldn't afford anywhere to rent.⁶²⁶

⁶²² Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶²³ John, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶²⁴ Finnigan, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶²⁵ Stroppey Old Git, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶²⁶ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

A decade later, in the late 1980s, Bibi squatted in a big estate in Manor House (north London). There, she lived with between two and about ten people, but – she said – ‘we were altogether part of a bigger community of maybe a hundred people or something’. The community was fairly homogenous economically: ‘Where I was living, most people were from a lower socio-economic background’, Bibi told me. Within that context, she explained, part of the ethos was that ‘if you have money, you’re meant to be sharing ... If I was paid and I had a lot of money one day, I would go home and get a lot of shopping, and I would make a big meal with a few other people, and then we’d all go out and buy lots of drinks’.⁶²⁷

Occasional sharing helped maintain a certain level of economic equality through redistribution. Some communities went further by promoting a full income sharing policy with the objective of tackling class-based privilege, even though this does not challenge other inequalities associated with class – such as education and cultural capital. An example is the Urupia commune in Apulia, where the communards pool their incomes. Vito lives in Urupia, where he takes part in the normal work-life routine of the commune, but he also works as a street artist during the Summer. This double life can be problematic, as he explained: ‘After fourteen years ... I found a balance between my artistic activity and my life as a communard ... because we’re communards 24/7, which means that you do agricultural and housekeeping work’. Furthermore, he added: ‘I currently am the only one with an income from activities outside the commune’. This underlines the difficulty of that choice.⁶²⁸

Vito and Bibi lived in two different kinds of communities – Urupia is a structured commune with long history and set of principles, whereas the Manor House squat was a much less organised community. For example, the communards of Urupia had already agreed on a list of ‘ground rules’ in 1993 – two years before opening the actual space.⁶²⁹ This was not the case of Manor House, which never formalised itself in this way. Nevertheless, both libertarian communities developed ways of redistributing wealth, and overcoming possible tensions over economic privileges. We see how economic privilege can damage a community in the case of Torricelli squat. Pino, one of the initial squatters, described how – for health and safety reasons – the council temporarily rehoused all the squatters in 1980 to refurbish the whole block, and then offered them the brand-new flats. While some preferred to stay in their ‘temporary’ houses, others like Pino returned. As their homes became regularised in this way, something changed. Pino noticed that, whenever flats remained empty in Torricelli, squatters would break in one and occupy it – and the other residents would complain: ‘Sometimes, the old squatters forget they

⁶²⁷ Bibi, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶²⁸ Vito, Interview on Urupia.

⁶²⁹ Urupia, ‘Primi Punti Consensuali Della Comune’, *Urupia* (blog), accessed 20 November 2014, <http://urupia.wordpress.com/primi-punti-consensuali-della-comune-settembre-1993/>.

once were squatters themselves. So, they nag the new squatters ... [They even call] the police when they see somebody squatting. Well, people change in life'.⁶³⁰

Tension among radical activists/squatters can also be triggered by the usage of and commitment to libertarian space. Apparently not connected to class-related issues, this can hide social and economic motives. Tensions on this ground are more likely to form in communities with a varied socio-economic composition, of which the history of the Barese social centres is a perfect example. Following the nationwide *Riflusso* (Ebb) of late-1970s, the Barese radical movement interested in libertarian spaces had mostly been fragmented and limited in number. In other cities, the presence of a larger and better organised anarchist movement permitted the creation of spaces with a strong libertarian identity. In Bari, meanwhile, a collective effort from various radical groups and individuals was necessary to open a social centre. The most obvious consequence was that such spaces developed a more ecumenical spirit. In the case of Villa Roth social centre, the activists even paired with homeless families in order to ensure the safety of the social centre – making sure that somebody was always inside the social centre helped to prevent the police from forcing an eviction.

The split between the two components – the activists and the homeless – arose almost immediately. Carmen was among the activists, although she also lived inside Villa Roth because she was a non-resident student at the Bari university. Talking of her experience, she told me:

Shortly after [the occupation], we realised that this thing was really hard to manage because the homeless were used to being taken care of: 'I go to the canteen to eat, to the dormitory to sleep, I wait for these services to be provided to me'. This thing clearly wasn't what we wanted. We wanted a self-managed canteen with us giving the homeless stuff to cook – somebody would collect waste food from the markets – and them cooking. So a self-management mechanism could be set up ... They simply wanted a place to sleep and to be served. We organised events ... and with that money we fixed the whole building, and [paid for] the food ... and we thought that – after a while – because you know that the money for your food comes from the events, you'd give us minimum help ... maybe you'd help us clean. Instead, they didn't get it. We spent shitload of energy in this dialogue with the homeless – people with a tough past ... We even had to send somebody away because once ... he'd threatened somebody with a knife'.⁶³¹

The same place was seen and lived differently by the two groups. The activists saw Villa Roth as an opportunity to organise events that would politicise both the underclass within and the working class without the social centre. Whereas, the homeless (the underclass) saw Villa Roth as a place to have free food and shelter. In fact, Carmen's story reveals also that behind this incompatibility are two different classes, or at least groups with distinct socio-economic features. On the one side, the homeless/underclass; and on the other, the activists with a generally higher level of personal or familial wealth and education.

⁶³⁰ Pino, Interview on Milan social centres.

⁶³¹ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

The same situation had already happened twice before the foundation of Villa Roth: at Ex-Mercato Occupato in 2010 and at Fucine Meridionali in 1994. Each time, incompatible ideas on how to live and manage the space led to tumultuous splits. What all these communities had in common was what another Barese activist – Tony – called ‘dynamic of belonging’. He summed up the point of view of the homeless squatters:

‘I’m in need, you’re not. You come here, do your things, and then go back home. Instead, I’m here night and day ‘cause I got no roof, no job – I live the space’. They’d developed a dynamic of belonging. The power relation was in their favour because they were more numerous, they spent more time there, they were more motivated by their situation. So, they completely dominated the ‘políticos’.⁶³²

The same dynamic had occurred three times in twenty years. At Fucine, Ex-Mercato and Villa Roth, the power relations were the opposite of what we had seen in previous communities – like in Bibi’s and Vito’s case, where the community had put in place compensation mechanisms to redistribute their economic privilege. In the Barese squats/social centres by contrast, the underprivileged homeless managed to undermine the whole community by simply boycotting it from the inside, as Carmen – involved in Ex-Mercato as well – confirmed:

The people living there – because in dire straits – started boycotting our political initiatives ... A person coming from Fucine, in his forties, who had his own anarcho-individualist theories, told [them]: ‘The only way to escape this society is to create your own society – a closed one – in which you survive and elude the system, because we’re the common people’. This is the ideological vision that these lads got – and they accepted it because it suited them. He told them: ‘You don’t have to do anything, you’re the best because you come from the street. What you have to do is drop out of society, and even better if you can screw society’.⁶³³

A language of hate that found fertile soil in the frustration and under-education of the young unemployed of Ex-Mercato. When this division started forming at Fucine Meridionali, Arcangelo – a co-founder of the social centre – noticed that the internal dynamics changed as well: ‘The lumpenproletariat part resumes its older practices, like drug dealing. The impressive thing the social centre had achieved was that all the characteristic aspects of the proletarian subcultures – such as machismo and mafia-type behaviours – had vanished. After a break, they resume’.⁶³⁴ It should be clear, by now, that Osborn’s claim about the classlessness of squats – or indeed of all libertarian communities – works more on paper than in reality. The idea of class has varied through time, and some libertarians prefer to highlight other aspects of their politics, such as feminism or gay liberation. What remained the same is that internal class-like differences – be they explicit or tacit – often undermined the cohesion and stability of libertarian communities. British and Italian communities of different periods have been equally affected by such class-

⁶³² Carmen and Tony.

⁶³³ Carmen and Tony.

⁶³⁴ Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

based tensions. From the socio-economic safety net allowing 1970s West London middle-class squatters to return to ‘that comfortable bourgeois life’ in the mainstream, to the under-education and unemployment of 2010s Ex-Mercato’s homeless. At the same time, this class-based divide can cripple any attempt of libertarians to have an impact on the surrounding local residents and, more in general, the wider mainstream.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have investigated the persistence of gender, ethnic, and class privilege within libertarian communities. What I have found is that various degrees of privilege, discrimination, domination, and oppression do exist – although mostly involuntary. Just like Foucault’s heterotopias, libertarian communities simultaneously ‘contested’ and ‘represented’ the mainstream. While radicals and squatters criticise the dominant modes of relations, and struggle to enfranchise themselves from discriminatory language and behaviours, they sometimes end up replicating them. Like de Certeau’s ‘ordinary people’, libertarians too produce a hybrid culture within their communities as a consequence of their negotiations with the mainstream. Yet, across various periods and regions, they generally provide an environment that is more progressive and alternative than the surrounding social context.

However, anthropologist Nazima Kadir – in her *The autonomous life?* – demonstrated the existence of further aspects fuelling the dynamics of hierarchy and authority within squatting communities. Again, by extension, this can be applied to all libertarian communities. She mentioned, for instance, the importance of excelling in certain skills.⁶³⁵ I noticed the presence of informal authorities in the communities I visited – informal because of the antiauthoritarian character of libertarian communities and because all participants were supposedly on the same level. In particular, the most influential people were usually those with a combination of oratory and practical skills. These were abilities that gained the trust of the others. However, as Carmen noted at the beginning of the chapter, the ‘leader’ was usually a male. Being radical/libertarian communities composed overwhelmingly by white people, he would also be white. Finally, there was also a good probability that his socio-economic privilege allowed him to study, thus developing his oratory skills, and providing him with theoretical frameworks. It is probable, then, that the informal ‘authority’ figure in a libertarian community was a white, middle-class male.

Thea from Urupia noted that her daily communitarian experience led her to move away from her ideological formation, and finally ‘embrace her human side’.⁶³⁶ This analysis comes as a reminder of the human side of the squatters/activists behind the libertarian communities, who were mostly born and raised within the mainstream. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that they end up replicating some aspects of the mainstream. Discussing safer spaces policies can surely

⁶³⁵ Nazima Kadir, *The Autonomous Life? Paradoxes of Hierarchy and Authority in the Squatters Movement in Amsterdam* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), <http://www.oapen.org/view?docId=608061.xhtml>.

⁶³⁶ Thea, Interview on Urupia.

help libertarians reflect on the pervasiveness of gender and ethnic privileges, but the discussion should be extended to include class-based power relations, as contemporary communities seem less mindful of this. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of 'intersectionality' is helpful in this respect. It describes all individual privileges as intersections in the same systems of oppression/domination/discrimination:

When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.⁶³⁷

Besides shedding light on the complexity of power-identification, Crenshaw envisions intersectionality as a tool to form coalitions between groups burdened by social domination. She suggests for example to overcome some aspects of feminist separatism by reconceptualised 'race' as a collation between men and women of colour.⁶³⁸ Similarly, all aspects of social discrimination could be reconceptualised as a collation between oppressed subjects (women, gays, ethnic minorities and working-class people) co-operating together as libertarian communities.

It is encouraging to notice that the eco-anarchist organisation Earth First! has openly embraced 'intersectionality' in the programme for its 2017 gathering by warning the participants that '[oppressive] behaviours and dynamics do not exist in isolation but intersect in complex and unexpected ways'. In fact, Earth First!'s 2017 handbook substituted the previous year's section 'Safer spaces agreement' with an 'Anti oppression statement' claiming: 'We have a sense that "safer space" policies create a false sense of security, that people tacitly agree to these "policies" whilst not actually undertaking to do the work/engage in the struggle to make meaningful changes to social relations'. Hence, after listing a series of unacceptable behaviours and dynamics, the organisers urged the participants:

to take responsibility for all your isms and phobias at the gathering – unlearning our shit is something we're all going through as we struggle to free ourselves from the conditioning that late-capitalist society imposes on us. We see this as a collective process, and feel that we should try and do this as gently and empathically as possible.⁶³⁹

Earth First! has been at the forefront of the anarchistic movement – its gathering programmes/websites included 'safer spaces policies' from 2013.⁶⁴⁰ Due to the fluid and open nature of the anarchist/libertarian movement, this new approach towards privilege might soon be

⁶³⁷ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, Polity (Cambridge, 2016), 2.

⁶³⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', in *Critical Race Theory*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (New York: The new press, 1995), 377.

⁶³⁹ Earth First!, 'Summer Gathering 2017 - Programme & Handbook', 2017, <http://cdn.frack-off.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/themes/frack-off/images/ef-programme-web-2017.pdf>.

⁶⁴⁰ Earth First!, 'Earth First! Summer Gathering 2013', Earth First! Summer gathering, 14 August 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130814035834/http://efgathering.weebly.com>.

replicated by other libertarian groups and communities both in Britain and in Italy. Following on from this investigation of gender, 'race' and class-based discriminations within libertarian communities, in the coming chapter I will explore how the political identity of libertarians has varied across different times and spaces.

Chapter Five

Libertarians (de)constructing their political identity

In 2004, the anarchist author Bob Black wrote: ‘Anarchists are having an identity crisis. Are they still, or are they only, the left wing of the left wing? Or are they something more or even something else?’¹ When I was designing my set of bullet points to cover with my interviewees, I planned to begin by asking them how they would define themselves politically. I was so sure of their self-identification as libertarians/anarchists that I had thought of this as an icebreaker. I soon found out that both my interviewees and their communities as a whole had mixed ideas and feelings about their political identities. Some of them proudly reclaimed the historically-charged terms, others preferred alternative definitions or a list of terms to define their identity. Some interviewees simply rejected all definitions or identifications. What most people shared in their answers was a combination of long pauses and confusion. Since 2004, the identity crisis observed by Black seems to have deepened. Not only are anarchists not sure if they are still ‘the left wing of the left wing’, but they are not sure of being anarchist at all. This led me to take a step back and investigate how the people involved in libertarian communities saw themselves from a political point of view. Historians’ interest in people’s self-identification has a tradition dating back to 1970s enquiries of social historians into social groups with a strong identitarian focus such as women, gays and ethnic minorities. Later, cultural historians also explored the identitarian theme, although from a post-modern perspective.² Extending their analysis of identities to contemporary social collectives, sociologists Manuel Castells and Pierre Bourdieu highlighted the importance of the identitarian awareness of the group. They claimed respectively that identities are such ‘only when and if social actors internalize them’, and that a ‘social collective exists if and when there exist agents who can say that they are [it]’.³

These statements motivated me into a further investigation of the identity of libertarians because, if confirmed, their putative identity crisis threatened not only the libertarian movement, but the wider radical Left too. Historically, anarchists/libertarians have always been an active part of the radical Left – both political and countercultural. Be they squatters or anarchist militants, all the libertarians I interviewed had also participated in radical subcultures (like the hippie and punk movements) or social movements (from feminism to alter-globalisation). Indeed scholars like Andrej Grubacic, David Graeber and George McKay highlight the anarchist character of those social movements and countercultures.⁴ So, is the apparent identitarian crisis of anarchists rooted in a crisis of the broader radical movement? Have those identities changed? And what are the reasons? To shed light on these questions, I hone in on analyses of individual life histories to draw out some answers and to highlight related differences between Italy and Britain. This chapter thus

draws on the political self-identification of my interviewees to retrace the history of the changes in the political identity of British and Italian libertarians over the last five decades.

1. Anarchy in the ... terminology: Deconstructing political self-identifications

When I first read of Frestonia, I imagined a group of hard-core situationist anarchists waging a playful but determined war on the British state. They had squatted a whole area in West London, and mocked both the British government and the United Nations by declaring independence in 1977. I had seen the famous picture of the 'Welcome to Frestonia' writing on a wall, in which the 'a' of Frestonia was the anarchist circle-a. I had read of the 'Ruff tuff cream puff' estate agency by Heathcote Williams and Nicholas Alberly, and how they offered to squat any property in what sounded like an empowering direct-action programme. I was consequently quite surprised when I discussed political self-identification with some former Frestonians and other London-based squatters. Josefine Speyer called herself a 'Labour sympathiser', but also Green, as she added: 'Environmental concerns are my concerns. I've always been thinking this way'.⁶⁴¹ Similarly, when I interviewed Jude in 2016 about her squatting experience in West London, she said: 'I'm Left. I support Jeremy Corbyn. When I first came up to London after university I did some work for the Labour party'.⁶⁴² John, meanwhile, smiled at me and admitted: 'I've voted for everybody except the Conservative party. Otherwise, I've always tried to vote for the person who wasn't going to win, as an encouragement. I've never voted for anybody who won. I don't know where that puts me politically'.⁶⁴³ This was not what I expected from people who had such a libertarian lifestyle, and who had directly promoted direct action and direct democracy.

Generally, anarchists avoid participating in elections, although they can make exceptions for referenda, which are closer to direct democracy. For instance, the Milanese anarcho-syndicalist Pino told me in his interview: 'I've never participated in any political election. I've voted only once in all my life, in a referendum. It was the one for abortion in '78'.⁶⁴⁴ Similarly, I personally knew some self-proclaimed British anarchists who voted in the so-called Brexit referendum in 2016. Some also admitted voting in local or national elections, and others even stood for elections in Britain and in Italy, as in the case of the Class War Party in 2015 and Partito Anarchico Italiano (Italian Anarchist Party) in the 1980s.⁶⁴⁵ Knowing this, I was aware that supporting a political party did not rule out the possibility that my interviewees could in effect be anarchists/libertarians. I feared a misinterpretation of the meaning of anarchism, so I asked them

⁶⁴¹ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁶⁴² Jude, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶⁴³ John, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶⁴⁴ Pino, Interview on Milan social centres.

⁶⁴⁵ Shane Croucher, 'Election 2015: Meet Class War, the Party Standing "Because All Other Candidates Are Scum"', *International Business Times UK*, 8 April 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/election-2015-meet-class-war-party-standing-because-all-other-candidates-are-scum-1495040>; 'PAI - Partito Anarchico Italiano', FdCA, accessed 26 July 2017, <http://www.fdca.it/storico/preistoria-fdca/pai.htm>.

further questions which revealed a lot of confusion and a lack of consensus about what anarchism and libertarianism meant. For instance, Jude said she is not an anarchist because:

I've become more a fan of having some containment. I don't actually believe in total lack of containment ... We need structures. I think we need *new* structures, but I think the absence of structure – which I think is what anarchy is normally thought of, sort of continuous revolution – as a psychoanalyst, that's important inside your mind, but you need external [structures].⁶⁴⁶

Jude's motivation is rooted in the common misconception that anarchists are disorganised and against all rules, rather than just against the rules imposed from above. Interestingly, Josefine's idea of an anarchist society seemed to go in the opposite direction. Initially, she stated she is not an anarchist because, although she saw 'anarchy [as] the opposite of tyranny and fascism', she does not 'go for extremes'. She added: 'Whilst I think it's good to consider certain things above nationhood – for instance, the environment ... – I think the other things you should be able to determine yourself ... Certain laws have to be your own true laws, moral laws'.⁶⁴⁷ In the end, she set personal freedom against transnational law, as if this is what an anarchist society would do. The federal systems envisioned by many anarchist authors – which I briefly illustrated at the beginning of this thesis – call for a coexistence of the two spheres, and so something quite different from Josefine's vision.

The widespread confusion on this theme is well represented by John, who changed his mind while trying to define anarchism in our interview:

I like Bertrand Russell's definition: 'Anarchism is impossible but you must have the tendency'. The most important is to have the tendency – You've got to see that as a starting point ... [I'm no anarchist] because I consider the total lawlessness rather tricky to sustain ... You can only have the tendency – you can't be an out-and-out anarchist ... but maybe being an out-and-out anarchist means something different to other people. It means without government, without bosses – Yeah, I'm in favour of 'without bosses'.⁶⁴⁸

After describing anarchism as impossible and lawless, he came to the conclusion that other definitions might be possible – such as having a society without a top-down government. All these answers demonstrated the all-pervasiveness of the dominant culture. As mainstream privileges and behaviours persist in libertarian communities (Chapter Four), so libertarians sometimes end up believing in and reproducing the mainstream portrayal of anarchy as chaos. These episodes convinced me to be wary of political self-definitions, and analyse instead the language used by my interviewees when answering my questions.

According to political scientist Anne Norton, it is through language that institutions make citizens internalise and identify with the socio-political order and its values. She explained that

⁶⁴⁶ Jude, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶⁴⁷ Speyer, Interview on Frestonia.

⁶⁴⁸ John, Interview on squatting in London.

‘thought is cast in language and identity articulated within it’. Consequently, the institutions’ authority depends on the citizens’ identification with the values expressed by the institutions. The power of language-induced identification is so pervasive that: ‘Once experienced collectively, publicly, [authority] is now experienced by individuals within themselves’. Hence, ‘[t]he seeming paradox of the citizen, who is at once ruler and ruled, sovereign and subject, reveals itself as the condition of all in politics and language’.⁶⁴⁹ Like Norton’s paradoxical citizen – who is at once ruler and ruled – some libertarians both lived anarchistic lives and believed in the negative image of anarchy portrayed by the mainstream. All this was possible due to the power of the mainstream to shape identities through language.

My decision to analyse the language of my interviewees, rather than using their statements as self-evident truths, is grounded in the practice of historians like Gareth Stedman Jones, especially after the so-called linguistic turn.⁶⁵⁰ Cultural/linguistic historian Gabrielle Spiegel highlighted the importance of focusing on the analysis of discourse, which she described as a ‘social realm involving structures of domination and systems of power’. This is fundamental because she argued that ‘any given society is constituted through a multiplicity of dynamic, fluid, and everchanging systems of meaning (discourses), which create ... regimes of “truth”’.⁶⁵¹ It is to deconstruct these artificial regimes of truth that cultural/linguistic historians shifted the focus of investigation from social phenomena to discourses. The growing attention to language generated the linguistic turn of 1980s, which aimed at demonstrating that society as a whole is constructed linguistically. However, Spiegel clarified that cultural history ‘never abandoned a belief in the objective reality of the social world’, and should therefore be more properly termed ‘socio-cultural history’. In fact, throughout this chapter, I situate my interviewees in the wider spatial-temporal contexts, within or against which their political identities developed and changed.⁶⁵²

2. ‘Natural’ and political anarchists in the 1970s

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the libertarian wave of 1968 gave new life to anarchism. Masses of young people rediscovered anarchist principles and tactics, and many joined or founded anarchist groups. Besides militant anarchists, the anarchist spirit was widespread in both Britain and Italy, where libertarian communities thrived – from squats to social centres. As I have said, however, few of those former squatters and activists self-identified with either the term ‘anarchist’ or ‘libertarian’. British interviewees especially instead generically described themselves as Left-wing supporters and often within the mainstream political framework. The Italians developed a

⁶⁴⁹ Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 47–49.

⁶⁵⁰ For further information on this, see: Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁶⁵¹ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ed., *Practicing History. New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn* (New York, London: Routledge, 2005), 11.

⁶⁵² Spiegel, 8, 9.

more explicit anarchistic self-awareness. The causes, I argue here, are in the different types of libertarianism that were dominant in the two countries at the time.

2.1 Squatting in 1970s London: The ‘natural anarchism’ of British libertarians

In Britain, the hippie counterculture of 1960s played a fundamental role in spreading libertarian lifestyles. A rebellious attitude towards the mainstream was deeply rooted in the hippie movement, and this manifested itself with the adoption of a libertarian lifestyle – living communally, no hierarchies, interest in alternatives to capitalism and materialism. Scepticism about scientific progress had replaced the boom years’ promise of a technological revolution. A growing share of the population believed technology caused death in wars, ecological disasters in the environment, and unemployment in the economy. As a consequence, political journalist Norman Shrapnel noticed: ‘Strange cults and sects flourished in pursuit of the higher escapism’. More generally, there was a surge of interest in spiritualism, eastern philosophies, folklore, and astro-archeology. All of this was accompanied by a growing number of drug users. Shrapnel identified as possible reasons for this a vacuum of spiritual poverty or social frustration, or even just trying to keep up with the ‘nervy times’.⁶⁵³ This analysis finds confirmation in the testimony of all the British interviewees who talked about the centrality of different forms of spirituality, and the widespread use of drugs. Music was very important too. Far from being disinterested in political issues, they were part of the process that scholars Laurel Forster and Sue Harper identified as the transformation of the 1960s sub-cultures into vociferous counter-cultures.⁶⁵⁴ Due to their subcultural formation, their spirituality, music and drug use were concrete embodiments of their libertarian politics, together with their communal lifestyle. Coming from the subcultures rather than political groups, they refused ‘straight politics’ and traditional definitions even though their lifestyle and beliefs were deeply anarchic.

When I asked Nigel Castle if he considered himself an anarchist when he was squatting, he replied: ‘We didn’t need those definitions. We might have been naturally a little bit anarchic, but we didn’t say: “Right, we have to be anarchist or this or that” ... It’s not easy to fit in those convenient definitions. It was quite a hodgepodge of things’. In fact, he continued:

Quite a few of us cared more about the music and the freedom rather than [politics] ... Politics didn’t have that much appeal ... You wouldn’t find the symbols of the Left versus the Right. It was more visionary. You’d have to be living in there to understand, ‘cause it was a lived thing rather than something you look to a newspaper or a book for.⁶⁵⁵

Here Nigel explained that his ‘naturally ... anarchic’ lifestyle was not inspired by a political group or readings, but by a more instinctive (‘visionary’) and hybrid (‘hodgepodge’) combination of

⁶⁵³ Norman Shrapnel, *The Seventies. Britain’s Inward March* (London: Constable, 1980), 66–85.

⁶⁵⁴ Laurel Forster and Sue Harper, eds., *British Culture and Society in the 1970s* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 5.

⁶⁵⁵ Castle, Interview on squatting in London.

factors – of which music was a fundamental component. An idea similar to Nigel’s ‘natural’ and ‘hybrid’ anarchism emerged in my interview to Shelley Assiter, one of the Frestonia residents. She stated: ‘I didn’t think I was an anarchist at the time. I just knew that I despised the rules of society. I despised how society behaved. And I was rebelling against, which made me an anarchist really’. However, her realisation came in a later stage because, talking of Frestonia, she said: ‘The whole thing was about anarchy – we were very much on the fringe of society. We did not play by the rules ... But it wasn’t “I am an anarchist!”’. For me these things were happening more organically’. Like Nigel’s natural anarchism, Shelley developed an anarchic behaviour as a spontaneous reaction to her environment, and was deeply influenced by a ‘hodgepodge of things’:

The whole hippie philosophy was about equality, and the feminist part of me – doing a lot of work towards equality – [wanted] equality for women ... Being hippies, we believed in freedom, free love – that turned out to be quite painful emotionally to a lot of people. Freedom, for me, it’s very much about challenging hierarchies, and challenging patriarchy ... I was always a rebel. From my adolescence onwards I started rebelling. I came from quite a restrictive background of religious Jewish [sic], and I broke out of all of it. For me that was the way to express my need for freedom, for equality.⁶⁵⁶

For squatters like Shelley and Nigel, their anarchic lifestyle and ideas were a direct reaction to the social repression they had experienced in their lives. They were influenced by the countercultures of their time, notably the hippie movement, which drew on a variety of elements – from music to drugs and spirituality. Although not essential, readings too were important for their formation as ‘rebels’. In particular, Nigel mentioned:

The novels of those times: south American magic realists (Gabriel Garcia Marquez), the English guys (Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Bertrand Russell), you had the poets (Walt Whitman, David Carpenter), from the East, from Turkey, the Middle East. Then you had these spiritual teachers ... the anthroposophists (Steiner), permaculture. It’s all interwoven.⁶⁵⁷

Such a variety of experiences and sources of inspiration inevitably shaped unorthodox forms of libertarianism. Interestingly, this sort of unorthodoxy applied also to the only former 1970s squatter among the interviewees who self-identified as an anarchist – Stropky Old Git. Talking of his anarchist identity, he stated: ‘What kind of anarchist? I would say bits and pieces of class-struggle and green anarchism, and even some bits of social anarchism as well’.⁶⁵⁸ Stropky Old Git developed an anarchist identity composed of aspects that encompassed class-based revolution, environmentalism, and communitarianism. However, this was the result of his personal and political experiences over several decades. These ranged from single-issue organisations, like Earth First! (radical environmentalism) and Reclaim The Streets (direct-action anti-capitalist

⁶⁵⁶ Assiter, Interview on Frestonia.

⁶⁵⁷ Castle, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶⁵⁸ Stropky Old Git, Interview on squatting in London.

environmentalism), to a brief participation in the socialist-anarchist group Big Flame.⁶⁵⁹ Yet, he deemed the latter not particularly relevant for his formation, as he told me:

I've never been a member of an anarchist group which is just an anarchist group. I've been involved in lots of things which are anarchist in their whole politics and everything, but they're doing something else such as ASS [Advisory Service for Squatters], such as Earth First!, such as Reclaim The Streets. These are all anarchist organisations, but they're not 'We're here to be anarchist, and we're this sort of anarchists and all other sorts of anarchists we hate them and they can fuck off, and we will publish this paper and we will write long tedious diatribes saying why they're wrong'. I've never been in one of those. Oh, I was a bit involved in Big Flame. It was intended to be a socialist-anarchist fusion, and I suppose I was deciding then there was more point in being an anarchist than a socialist, but I was on its fringe briefly and it didn't last that long, Big Flame.⁶⁶⁰

Stroppy Old Git's statement is a clear mockery of the political anarchist groups, as opposed to the activist organisations that are 'anarchist in their whole politics'. He depicted the former as groups of self-centred and quarrelsome politicians, and the latter as the real embodiment of anarchist politics, all focused on direct action and campaigns. His words and experiences embody the essence of anarchism in Britain, which expressed itself more through hybrid and countercultural movements than through political groups. As historian David Goodway wrote, 'in Britain pure anarchism ... never achieved any better than a minuscule following'.⁶⁶¹

2.2 OAP/ORA: Anarchist identity as unifying factor in 1970s Italy

In Italy the hippie counterculture helped to spread hybrid forms of libertarianism. A famous example is that of Ovada hippie commune (1970-71) in Piedmont, where drop-out students lived without running water or electricity, but with plenty of music and hallucinogenic drugs. There their 'natural anarchism' blended with spirituality and generated a hybrid that inhabited the walls of the commune with a mixture of anarchist symbols, meditation mantras and hippie slogans. The hybrid subjects living in such communities were ironically called 'anarcho-hippies' by the politicised component of the countercultural movement.⁶⁶² While such forms of 'natural anarchism' were dominant in Britain, political awareness and anarchistic identities were common among Italian libertarians in the 1970s. All my Italian interviewees from that period had been active in organisations that were explicitly anarchist, and told me of much heated dispute with activists from other leftist currents. This reflects the common image of 1970s Italy as a highly politicised society, in which social movements, mainstream parties and revolutionary groups involved a large part of the young population.⁶⁶³ British 'natural anarchists' – like Nigel Castle –

⁶⁵⁹ Big Flame lasted for fourteen years, from 1970 until 1984. In time, it turned from a 'revolutionary socialist' group into a 'libertarian Marxist' organisation 'Who We Were', *Big Flame* (blog), 3 April 2009, <https://bigflameuk.wordpress.com/about/>.

⁶⁶⁰ Stroppy Old Git, Interview on squatting in London.

⁶⁶¹ Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 326.

⁶⁶² Gallino, *La Comune Hippy Di Ovada*, xix–xxxiv.

⁶⁶³ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 358–70.

perceived politics as something distant and artificial ('Quite a few of us cared more about the music and the freedom rather than [politics] ... Politics didn't have that much appeal'). By contrast, the impact of politics on Italian society was overwhelming, as clashes in the streets, terrorist actions and political violence between far-right and far-left activists were daily events.

Schools and universities were central in this process. It was through experiences within student organisations that many first encountered anarchist ideas. There, many young people became politicised by meeting and visiting their peers who belonged to a whole range of radical groups, including anarchists. This is what happened to many of the people forming the anarchist organisation OAP/ORA in 1970s Bari.⁶⁶⁴ One of them, Franco Scalese, told me: 'It was inside the [student] Movement that I met some students who called themselves anarchist communists – I hung out with them. Before this, I had no idea what anarchism was'.⁶⁶⁵ Similarly, Salvatore Caggese discovered anarchism when he 'met the libertarians ... at the university', although, he added: 'The encounter with the actual libertarian movement happened in Piazza Umberto, this too [together with the university] at the heart of Bari's political life'.⁶⁶⁶ This was confirmed by Luciano Sepe since Piazza Umberto was the open-air precursor of the social centres (Chapter Two). Luciano Sepe was a key figure for the Barese anarchist movement, and one of the founders of the OAP/ORA organisation. In Piazza Umberto, he said:

The 'culturally different' met: the hippies, the longhaired. There, we got to know each other, and we started the anarchist group of Bari. Then, step by step, we evolved as we tried to identify a political idea: no more the anarchists as those who always say 'no', but as those who say 'yes' to a certain political position. So, from the vague Anarchist Group of Bari 'Direct Action', we evolved to form the OAP/ORA.⁶⁶⁷

The difference between the two groups is that the former was in line with the main national anarchist organisation (Federazione Anarchica Italiana, FAI), which united individuals and groups with a variety of anarchist views. The OAP/ORA became gradually intolerant of the FAI's ecumenism, and finally built a nationwide independent network of groups united by the anarcho-communist identity. Luciano's testimony explains the motifs behind such decision:

At the time, it was fashionable to be lefty. So, there was a very high turnover of young people, who joined, but then left, and then came back. So, there's no clear number of militants – we had no membership drive, of course. ... When there were no [clear] political positions, anybody could claim to be an anarchist, and had the right to tell the others: 'You're wrong, 'cause anarchy is this'.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁴ Founded as *Organizzazione Anarchica Pugliese* (OAP, Apulian Anarchist Organisation) in 1974, the *Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica* (ORA, Anarchist Revolutionary Organisation) was set up in 1976 as a regional network of anarcho-communist groups. It became a national organisation in 1978, and finally changed its name as *Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici* (FdCA, Federation of Anarchist Communists) in 1986. FdCA, 'Alternativa Libertaria/FdCA - Albero Genealogico', FdCA, accessed 10 June 2017, <http://www.fdca.it/organizzazione/alberogenealogico.jpg>.

⁶⁶⁵ Franco Scalese, Interview on OAP-ORA, 11 November 2009.

⁶⁶⁶ Caggese, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁶⁶⁷ Sepe, Interview on OAP-ORA.

⁶⁶⁸ Sepe.

In the eyes of Luciano Sepe and his comrades, the post-1968 anarchist movement was unable to launch any revolutionary process because of such fluidity. A high level of instability and precariousness that made the movement weak. To counteract this situation, the Barese activists proposed to shape their militancy around principles from anarcho-communist texts that had started re-circulating in those years. Especially important was the ‘theoretical-strategic unity’: Two levels of membership – sympathisers, and actual militants. In order to become militants, the candidates had to learn the ‘key theses’ of the so-called 1926 anarcho-communist Platform, and pass an internal exam. This, in the opinion of the OAP/ORA members, would lead to a higher identitarian unity of the anarchist militants, which would guarantee more internal cohesion, and therefore strengthen their movement.⁶⁶⁹

In 1978, the ORA became a national organisation with groups in several regions, and connections with other anarcho-communist organisations abroad through an international platformist network. A cornerstone in its politics was the involvement of its members within libertarian communities. They referred to it as ‘organisational dualism’, which called for the simultaneous presence of anarchist militants inside both a ‘specific organisation’ and a ‘mass organisation’. The former was the anarchist political group – such as the OAP/ORA – while the latter was the product of the organisation efforts of the working-class, like student associations, trade unions, neighbourhood committees. The OAP/ORA clarified in a document how organisational dualism worked – they claimed to be aiming at:

[T]he simultaneous action of both a specific anarcho-communist organisation and a proletarian mass organisation in order to realise the unity, autonomy, class consciousness and internationalism for the construction of anarchist communism ... The specific organisation is characterised by its theoretic and strategic unity, tactical homogeneity and un-contradictory nature. It is composed of militants who are fully responsible towards the organisation. ... The mass organisation, autonomous and proletarian, is the strategic objective that the proletariat sets for itself in order to facilitate and to realise, through it and in conjunction with the specific org[anisation], the social revolution.⁶⁷⁰

By maintaining a theoretical and identitarian unity within their political organisation, the OAP/ORA members could operate within broader organisations – like the Barese neighbourhood committee in the working-class area of San Pasquale. Thus, they believed they could work more effectively to both help local people solve their problems, and radicalise them in preparation of a possible social revolution. From this perspective, a shared political identity acquired a central role in the politics of OAP/ORA members. However, a strong emphasis on a shared anarchist identity was – and still is – present also in other national anarchist organisations, such as the FAI. This was the oldest active anarchist federation, and had a more ‘ecumenical’ approach with its

⁶⁶⁹ For further information regarding the history of the OAP/ORA, see: Lapolla, *Gli anarchici di piazza Umberto. La sinistra libertaria a Bari negli anni Settanta*.

⁶⁷⁰ Convegno Nazionale dei Lavoratori Anarchici, ‘I CNLA Bulletin’.

synthesist programme, which preferred an ‘anarchism without adjectives’ to OAP/ORA’s anarcho-communist identitarian unity. Yet, the FAI openly stated it would dismiss those people whose behaviour appeared ‘in contrast with the principles of anarchism’.⁶⁷¹ The Italian anarchist movement developed such a structured and identity-based approach as a reaction to the richness, but also fragmentation and fluidity, of the national political scene.

3. ‘Anarchy, but unburdened by politics’: Punks re-semanticise anarchy in the long 1980s

At the end of the 1970s, libertarian spaces suffered from the change in the political climate of both Britain and Italy. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the 1980s brought about an ebbing phase for radical activists in both Britain and Italy, where the long wave of the so-called ‘Reagan-era hedonism’ reached every household through American and American-style films and advertising. They portrayed a new, bigger, wealthier lifestyle based on individualism and neoliberalism, as opposed to the 1970s left-wing concepts of cooperation and internationalism. Against this was the punk counterculture that spread through Europe and America in those years. Punk music had a very important role in conveying values and slogans at odds with the mainstream, rather as the hippies had done in the 1970s. Former punk Carolyn identified these values with ‘DIY culture, self-organising, people working collectively’, even though she confessed: ‘I wasn’t influenced by punk music myself. Punk culture, yes. Punk music, no’.⁶⁷² Her comment highlights the strength of the punk movement, which was much more than a simple music genre. As punk spread, it established a dialogue with the anarchist movement. This enriched both movements by (re)introducing some anarchists to issues such as environmentalism and antispecism, and some punks to the anarchist tradition. However, parts of the ‘traditional’ anarchist movement – especially among the anarcho-communists and syndicalists – sometimes struggled to accept the so-called anarcho-punks (or punx).⁶⁷³

3.1 Bibi and Carolyn: Two types of British anarcho-punks

In Britain, the ‘Reagan-era hedonism’ was fully embodied by conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher, whose belief in the ‘individual’ came to light in an interview in 1987, when she claimed that ‘there is no such thing as society’.⁶⁷⁴ The policies of her governments (1979-90) created the ideal conditions for the reinforcement of individualism and neoliberalism among the British. This led to increasing divisions between rich and poor, privileged and less-privileged, which caused a civil disorder manifesting in rising crime and rioting.⁶⁷⁵ Although Thatcher resigned in 1990, historian Alwyn W. Turner highlighted her influence over the following decade, as ‘the spirit of greed and selfishness’ she had unlocked persisted in the years following her

⁶⁷¹ ‘Patto Associativo Della Federazione Anarchica Italiana (FAI)’.

⁶⁷² Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁶⁷³ Romiti, ‘Punk’.

⁶⁷⁴ ‘Interview for Woman’s Own (“no Such Thing as Society”)', Margaret Thatcher Foundation, accessed 28 June 2017, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>.

⁶⁷⁵ Alwyn W. Turner, *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s* (London: Aurum, 2010), ix–xxi.

departure from Office. Turner yet stated that much of the political and cultural developments of the 1990s were an attempt to demonstrate that there was in fact ‘such a thing as society’.⁶⁷⁶ Libertarian spaces come as an example of this.

Carolyn and Bibi were both squatting in London between the late 1980s and early 1990s, and were both deeply influenced by the punk culture. When I asked them if they would define themselves as anarchists, Carolyn said she would, whereas Bibi would not. However, their answers said much more than this. Carolyn was born and raised in rural Scotland, and only later came to London, where she started squatting in the Brixton area. She told me that in Scotland she already saw herself as a feminist, but in London her ‘feminism has evolved’. Important for her ‘evolution’ was her experience inside the 121 Centre – a squatted social centre in Lambeth (1981-1999) whose politics was deeply rooted in the anarcho-punk movement. Additionally, her participation in the squatting of the Claremont Road area in east London contributed to her personal and political growth. She claimed that by ‘living and doing stuff with people’ in those spaces, she was gradually introduced to anarchist practices. So, she concluded: ‘I probably didn’t identify as an anarchist when I was still at school [in Scotland], but I definitely decided “Yes, I’m an anarchist” at some later point’.⁶⁷⁷ Carolyn stressed the importance that ‘living and doing stuff with [anarchist] people’ had for her identitarian development as an anarchist. A pathway grounded on practices rather than theory.

Bibi too was a former squatter and punk, but she firmly stated: ‘I wouldn’t [define myself as an anarchist] but I would say that that philosophy means a lot to me. It’s very integrated into my ethics’. In particular, she said she has ‘incorporated a lot of anarchist ideas’ such as anti-authoritarianism and individual liberation. Although she was sure she was no anarchist, Bibi was not able to explain what she meant by ‘anarchism’. She claimed: ‘I guess I don’t like having any label – being anarchist or socialist or any of that. And I also think that people, myself included, are complex. And that sort of labels may be misunderstood or they can be very limiting’.⁶⁷⁸ Bibi’s attitude towards ‘labels’ like ‘anarchist’ and ‘socialist’ can be traced back to her habit of not discussing politics with her housemates because they deemed it ‘uncool’. She nevertheless added that some of her housemates did call themselves ‘anarchist’, but she remembered that it was in jest and a fun way to signal their rebellion against the system. Paradoxically, by doing this, they were utilising the mainstream misconception of anarchism. From their point of view, politics was ‘uncool’ because they saw it as abstract and boring.

Bibi and the other squatters contrasted this type of politics with the punk attitude based on Do-It-Yourself culture and direct actions. They lived a libertarian lifestyle and took part in political actions like the protests against the Poll Tax in 1990, so they were in fact political. What they lacked was a theoretical reflection on their actions. Carolyn acquired this skill by hanging

⁶⁷⁶ Alwyn W. Turner, *A Classless Society. Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum, 2013), 3–14.

⁶⁷⁷ Carolyn, Interview on squatting in London (part two).

⁶⁷⁸ Bibi, Interview on squatting in London.

out with the activists of the 121 social centre, who were more politically aware. As a former squatter told me during an informal discussion, they had been deeply influenced by punks from mainland Europe – especially Spain and Italy – who were more politicised. In particular, Italians went to London to avoid the then compulsory military service, or to avoid state repression, and there mingled with other punks in social centres like the 121 and in groups like Class War. There are similarities instead between Bibi and people like Shelley Assiter and Nigel Castle, who used to squat in the 1970s. They all came from subcultures – the punk movement the former, and the hippie/libertarian movement the latter, and had thus developed forms of ‘natural anarchism’ – that is an anarchism rooted in practice rather than in theoretical-political elaborations.

3.2 Nico: ‘A human anarchist being’

In Italy there were people with different levels of political awareness within the punk movement, although the presence of punks with a political background was more significant than in Britain, as Nico Caldarulo confirmed during our interview. Nico was one of founders of the Giungla punk social centre in Bari, and a significant figure in the Italian punk/reggae scene. I interviewed him twice because his testimony was very rich and powerful, and because he would constantly expand and shift the focus of our discussion for hours. As a boy, Nico had joined the revolutionary Left after some formative events. He developed a strong anticlerical feeling when a local priest harassed his younger sister, and then became antifascist following the fascist beating of a student. Only later, in the 1980s, he became a punx: ‘We started from a libertarian idea, which turned into militant antifascism, and then became punk antagonism’. However, he noted that there were also punks who were not politicised. Their being punk was more a lifestyle or a fashion choice (punkism) than a political decision: ‘I came from politics, so – to me – being against the state was much more political than *Anarchy in the UK* or punkism’.⁶⁷⁹

In those years, the ‘Reagan-era hedonism’ had permeated Italian society as well. Historian Paul Ginsborg highlighted the influential role played by the mass media in shaping and ‘homologising’ Italian society along an Anglo-American model in the 1980s. Television was particularly important, as Italians spent an increasing amount of time watching it for information and leisure. Italian television, argued Ginsborg, presented a ‘sorry picture’ with its ‘massive number of imports from the USA’. Rather than helping people analyse and understand society that was changing rapidly around them, it provided traditional and reassuring cultural schemas.⁶⁸⁰ From a political point of view, the 1980s were characterised by the Ebb – Left militants abandoned radical politics to enter mainstream society while others started using hard drugs during the heroin epidemics that continued into the 1990s. While the radical Left became marginal in the social and political landscape, the centrist DC – the party that had dominated Italian politics since the first

⁶⁷⁹ Nico Caldarulo, Interview on Giungla (part one), 23 August 2015.

⁶⁸⁰ Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents. 1980-2001*, 108–12.

republican elections in 1946 – was hit by the P2 scandal.⁶⁸¹ The leader of the reformist Socialist Party (PSI) Craxi exploited this situation, and became the first socialist Prime Minister. His governments (1983-87) led Italy through a new affluent phase. His leadership both mirrored and influenced the new type of Italian politics and society characterised by a positive outlook on authoritarianism, ambition and individualism.⁶⁸² As a reaction to all this, strong ‘countercurrents’ took shape in the 1980s. Groups of people with shared objectives began meeting over pragmatic issues rather than ideological ones, such as environmentalism. They distanced themselves from the two main traditional Italian ideologies – the Catholic Church and the Communist Party – but also from the radical groups of the 1970s.⁶⁸³

Nico Caldarulo was politically aware and very active since he regularly took part in demonstrations, especially against fascists. He yet struggled with the concept of politics – like Bibi. He called himself ‘a human anarchist being’, which he defined as a concept radically different from the traditional idea of the anarchist militant because: ‘I want to free myself from politics’.⁶⁸⁴ He explained that he sought ‘anarchy, but unburdened by politics’, and then clarified:

All that can’t be defined, let’s call it ‘zero’. Politics? Zero! So, if it’s zero, let’s not discuss it anymore! ... my brothers of the Giungla [social centre] and I had an idea – the only way to really make the revolution and fuck the system in the arse, the state, the corporations – no consuming! The idea was not to be their accomplice, to back out of their supply-demand. Bo-y-cott! ... I’ll show you a picture of two punks, both dead, pissing with their dick out and laughing like crazy. Yes, maybe that’s what we did: we pissed in the face of the state and laughed like crazy.⁶⁸⁵

Nico’s words provide a vivid impression of the instinctive vision and way of life of the punx, whose politics and lives were completely intertwined. In order to free themselves from the vagueness of politics, Nico and his punk ‘brothers’ had put up a defiant type of ‘lived politics’ that drew on their version of what Nigel had defined as ‘natural anarchism’, as opposed to both traditional anarchism and lifestyle punkism. However, their lack of interest in the traditional anarchist movement and its history contributed to the deepening confusion around the meaning of the term ‘anarchism’. The punk counterculture created a semiotic no man’s land in which anybody could appropriate and re-semanticise ‘anarchy’ and its symbols – the circle-A above all. Thus, on the one hand, Nico decided to create a neologism (‘a human anarchist being’) to distance himself from traditional anarchism. On the other hand, Bibi’s friends jokingly called themselves anarchists, thus owning the term that the mainstream used in a derogatory way to indicate the

⁶⁸¹ Several prominent politicians, industrials, journalists and military leaders were found to be part of the P2: A clandestine masonic organisation involved in many national crimes and mysteries. ‘BBC on This Day. 26 May 1981: Italy in Crisis as Cabinet Resigns’, BBC, accessed 2 July 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/26/newsid_4396000/4396893.stm. See also: Paul Ginsborg, *Silvio Berlusconi : Television, Power and Patrimony* (London: Verso, 2004).

⁶⁸² Lanaro, *Storia dell’Italia Repubblicana*, 444–51.
⁶⁸³ Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents. 1980-2001*, 119–21.

⁶⁸⁴ Caldarulo, Interview on Giungla (part one).
⁶⁸⁵ Nico Caldarulo, Interview on Giungla (part two), 26 August 2015.

squatters as people living without law and order. They may have been instinctively anarchic anyway ('natural anarchists'), but they did not really identify with the anarchist movement and tradition, of which they generally knew little. In both Britain and Italy, the libertarian countercultures of the 1960s-70s (hippie movement) and 1980s-90s (punk culture) helped renovate the anarchist movement by enriching its practices and themes. At the same time, the countercultures contributed to shaping a new anarchistic identity which was distant from the history of the anarchist movement.

4. Rediscovering and 'customising' the anarchist identity in the mid-1990s and early-2000s

Between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s a new identitarian tendency spread first in Italy, and then in Britain too. Young radicals rediscovered and reinterpreted traditional political movements like anarchism and *Autonomia*. As scholar Sean M Sheehan stated, 'anarchism re-emerg[ed] from a period of dormancy' and with roots in the global South. The 1996 International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism in Zapatista's Chiapas (Mexico) relaunched on a global level anarchist principles like direct action and participatory democracy.⁶⁸⁶ The collapse of the Eastern European bloc between late 1980s and early 1990s had brought the Cold War to an end, and demonstrated the failure of state communism. The majority of European radicals had already distanced themselves from the Soviet Union and its satellites by then, but the existence of those 'communist' countries represented a counterbalance to the capitalism of the United States. Because of this, the main Left-wing parties of Britain and Italy – Labour and PCI – had long maintained an ambivalent attitude toward the Eastern bloc. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, both parties became free from such ambivalence, and underwent deep transformations into modern social-democratic parties.⁶⁸⁷ Now fully integrated in the capitalist system, they won elections in the mid-1990s. In Britain they won as 'New Labour', in Italy the heirs of the PCI won as a part of a Centre-Left coalition. However, scores of people with leftist tendencies felt increasingly alienated by policies they deemed too moderate, or even openly conservative. So, to quote Turner, 'the tide turned rapidly', and numerous disillusioned Left-wing voters abandoned those parties.⁶⁸⁸ By contrast, social centres and alternative networks based on direct democracy became increasingly common.

4.1 Gennaro and Arcangelo: Re-interpreting anarchism in social centres

In her chapter *The Italian anomaly*, anthropologist Michal Osterweil retraced the history of the Italian anti-globalisation movement. She highlighted the influence that Italian radical activists had on the global movement, and explored the factors that enabled this. In particular, she

⁶⁸⁶ Sean M. Sheehan, *Anarchism* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 7–24.

⁶⁸⁷ Turner, *A Classless Society. Britain in the 1990s*, 421–49; Silvio Pons, 'La Bipolarità Italiana E La Fine Della Guerra Fredda', in *L'Italia Contemporanea Dagli Anni Ottanta a Oggi*, ed. Silvio Pons, Adriano Roccucci, and Federico Romero, vol. 1 Fine della guerra fredda e globalizzazione (Roma: Carocci, 2014), 46–53.

⁶⁸⁸ Turner, *A Classless Society. Britain in the 1990s*, 443.

underlined the role played by ‘submerged networks’ in the construction of a heterogeneous movement that united different campaigns and politicised young activists.⁶⁸⁹ As we saw in the previous chapters, social centres were at the centre of this process. They worked as hubs where diverse groups met and young people became radicalised. This was possible because social centres proliferated in the first half of the 1990s. In those years, the *Tangentopoli* scandal (Bribeville, 1992-94) shook the Italian political system causing the demise of the main historical parties and of the so-called First Republic. Distrust in party politics was at its peak. At the same time, the long wave of the Pantera student movement (1990) had politicised masses of young Italians, and introduced them to a radical type of politics based on direct action. Social centres offered a space where Italian students could socialise and continue their political education.

The Fucine Meridionali social centre (1994-95) in Bari is a perfect example of this new type of libertarian hub where multiple identities met and influenced each other. Gennaro is now a Barese activist and precarious worker, and was one of the first to join the occupation of Fucine Meridionali. I interviewed him at Ex-Caserma Liberata, where he has returned to being actively involved in a social centre after roughly twenty years. He valued the richness of Fucine’s components bringing a variety of new themes inside the social centre, such as gay rights and vegetarianism, which the activists debated from a political angle. Gennaro recounted the enthusiasm for the organisation of the first Gay Pride in Bari – a deeply conservative city. His own vegetarianism also dated from this time, as he called it ‘a political deed, because I see this as a stance against a production system of goods and food that is destructive and devastating’.

Unlike the Giungla social centre of Nico Caldarulo, which Gennaro too recognised as ‘a fundamentally anarcho-punk experience’, in Fucine various political identities coexisted. Gennaro told me:

I consider myself lucky because [there] I met loads of great people who taught me lots of things. The experience of Fucine Meridionali is what allowed me to understand on which side to stand because it was composed of different political groups, ranging from anarchists to anarcho-sindicalists, libertarians tout court, comrades from the *Autonomia*, those who came from *Lotta Continua per il Comunismo*, many coming from the struggles of *Pantera*. So, it was a very lively scene, full of people.⁶⁹⁰

Such a variety of experiences and identities fired debates about theoretical politics – something that did not happen in most anarcho-punk spaces in the 1980s. Gennaro remembered that younger activists like himself read extensively to expand their political knowledge and to be a match for the older militants. Thus Gennaro discovered he was a libertarian – he rejected the word ‘communist’, which he linked to authoritarianism and hierarchies: ‘I refuse the idea of party. The

⁶⁸⁹ Michal Osterweil, ‘The Italian Anomaly. Place and History in the Global Justice Movement’, in *Understanding European Movements. New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest*, ed. Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 33–46.

⁶⁹⁰ Gennaro, Interview on Fucine Meridionali and Ex-Caserma Liberata.

idea that within an organisation there must necessarily be a leader'. Interestingly, he also said he was no anarchist because:

I don't have the ability to make radical choices like those of other comrades. I met anarchists who refused to work, and they really did it. They lived in the countryside ... and were politically active. I know loads of anarchist comrades who work, and they work in value-producing capitalist structures. Then I could ask them: 'Don't you see the contradiction?'. But life is a mess full of contradictions.⁶⁹¹

Gennaro sees anarchists as a more radical version of libertarians like himself. Anarchists to him are people who make more extreme life choices, like living outside the capitalist system as much as possible. Far from academic debates on libertarianism and anarchism, Gennaro's personal experiences shaped his perception of anarchists. A mixture of readings, discussions and personal reflections helped him form his own political identity (libertarian) in opposition to others (communist and anarchist).

Arcangelo is another example of how people in libertarian spaces rediscovered and customised traditional political identities in the 1990s. He was one of the founders of Fucine Meridionali, and told me that at that time he used to define himself as an 'anarchist communist', or anarcho-communist. When I spoke with him, he could not remember exactly the chronological process that led him to this awareness. He knew only that he came to that realisation through reading anarchist authors, listening to punk music, but also as a reaction to the communist (PCI) tradition of his family. In the previous chapter, I noted how Arcangelo's connected back to the anarchist tradition by reading Malatesta and participating in demonstrations in Canosa – one of the historical strongholds of Apulian anarchism. Here I want to show that his was not only an operation to recover a forgotten the past. Arcangelo customised his anarchist identity by blending the anarcho-communist tradition with the libertarian countercultures and, in particular, with the punk subculture: 'At the time, I was a punk. So I could hardly identify with something that wasn't anarchic and libertarian'. The result was an anarchism that he defined as: 'Not too far from communism. It's the idea of a social practice, but also on a personal level, where there's maximum individual autonomy, maximum freedom, the idea that you use self-organisation to create something, the idea of spontaneism'.⁶⁹²

Arcangelo's anarchist identity differed profoundly from that of 1980s anarcho-punks and 1970s anarcho-communists. Arcangelo was a punk like Nico, but his readings grounded his anarchism in theory as opposed to Nico's instinctive and practice-based 'natural anarchism'. Additionally, Arcangelo saw himself as an anarcho-punk, like the OAP/ORA members did in the 1970s, and both rediscovered the anarchist tradition – Arcangelo reading Malatesta and visiting Canosa, and the OAP/ORA militants reprinting the 1926 Platform and other long-forgotten texts.

⁶⁹¹ Gennaro.

⁶⁹² Arcangelo, Interview on Fucine Meridionali.

However, his anarcho-communism gave great importance to the spontaneist experiences of the countercultures to eschew authoritarianism. The 1970s activists had earlier theorised a rigidly structured form of anarcho-communism to limit spontaneism and what they saw as the dangers of a disorganised movement. Overall, the 1990s saw a process of re-appropriation of the anarchist identity. A process that started with the rediscovery of the anarchist past, but only to ‘customise’ it on the basis of historical needs (maximum distance from the failure of authoritarian communism) and personal experiences (readings, discussions, subcultural and familiar backgrounds). An effect of such customisation was the lack of a shared definition of anarchism.

4.2 Alessio and Barry: Rediscovering anarchism and expanding its scope

The same phenomenon of rediscovery and ‘customisation’ of the anarchist tradition happened in Britain between the mid-1990s and early-2000s. Turner wrote that the mid-1990s were a time when ‘political commitment was in retreat’. This was a consequence of Thatcherism, which had severed the connection between people and society, and also created a sense of defeat in the working class. Music, cinema and television reflected such tendencies with less political content. Thus, apoliticism hid a widespread hopelessness, and lack of faith in future progress. However, some people did become involved in active politics precisely as a reaction to this scenario. Turner highlighted that the numbers participating in the anti-road movement were relatively small, and none of the various campaigns succeeded in stopping the construction of the bypasses. Yet ‘their tenacity and ingenuity – including the building of tree houses and tunnels – still managed to attract the interest of the media. Their actions drew the attention of the public on issues that were both environmental and socio-economic’.⁶⁹³ So, partly following on from the shift in public opinion over road building, the newly elected Labour government (1997-2001) scrapped the Tories’ road-building programme. Moreover, the anti-roads movement played a fundamental role in the revival of the radical movements in Britain throughout the 1990s. It mobilised people who had not protested before and developed new direct action tactics. In addition, sociologist Cristina Flesher Fominaya highlighted its importance in pushing activists beyond the old single-issue approach. She presented the anti-roads movement as the precursor of the anti-capitalist networks of the late-1990s, which linked their critique of capitalism to environmentalism and social justice. These networks organised a variety of demonstrations pre-dating the ‘battle of Seattle’ of 1999 against the World Trade Organisation, when they burst into public awareness under the collective banner of the Global Justice Movement.⁶⁹⁴

By then, Britain had its first Labour government in twenty years. Many interviewees confirmed that they had seen the election of Tony Blair in 1997 as a positive step, but soon

⁶⁹³ Turner, *A Classless Society. Britain in the 1990s*, 428–37.

⁶⁹⁴ Cristina Flesher Fominaya, ‘Movement Culture Continuity. The British Anti-Roads Movement as Precursor to the Global Justice Movement’, in *Understanding European Movements. New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest*, ed. Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 109–24.

changed their mind and returned to forms of direct action politics. Journalist Philip Stephens triumphantly affirmed that, '[l]ike Thatcher, Blair changed the political weather'.⁶⁹⁵ He renovated the image and the identity of the Labour party, like Craxi had done with the Italian Socialist Party in the 1980s. In the words of historian Anthony Seldon, Blair swept 'the party clear of unpopular and outdated "Old" Labour policies, on the economy, tax, trade unions, defence and Northern Ireland, and then embed[ed] the "New" Labour style and policies'. He did not for instance repudiate 'any of Thatcher's policies ... her privatisations remained and were even added to'. Further examples are his 'bold decisions' to deploy British troops in Kosovo in 1999 and Sierra Leone in 2000 'justifying military intervention in sovereign countries on humanitarian grounds, which later underpinned the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq'.⁶⁹⁶

The socio-political context of those years contributed to the radicalisation of many contemporary activists. An example is Alessio Lunghi – an Italian-born British activist in his late-30s, who became drawn to radical politics in the late-1990s and early-2000s through the experiences of Reclaim The Streets and the post-Seattle alter-globalisation demonstrations (Global Justice Movement):

At the time there was an upturn of anarchist ideas, especially because it was at the beginning of the anti-capitalist movement. So, a lot of people of my age – which was around 18, 19, 20 years old – were drawn to the more confrontational elements of that movement. But also in terms of ideas, we tended to respond to the criticism of the past revolutionary movements – mainly authoritarian state socialism. That was the departure point for me. Looking critically at history and trying to find a historical legacy to pick up on.⁶⁹⁷

With the help of an older Italian colleague who lent him books by anarchist authors, Alessio discovered and became immediately 'attracted to anarchism – it was something that wasn't tarnished by history, unlike other frameworks'.⁶⁹⁸

A similar story is that of Barry – a man in his mid-30s who became involved in the Bristol-based Kebele social centre in 1997. He told me that it was in the late-1990s when: 'I started seeing more about the system and what it stood for, and the huge inequalities and the violence ... [of] capitalism as a whole'. In that period, Kebele was one of the main hubs of the anti-capitalist and environmentalist Reclaim The Streets network. Before then, he was mostly involved in animal rights and animal liberation struggles, but he later overcame his single-issue approach. He stated:

When I was a teenager, for me animal abuse was the most horrific thing. But then, when you find out more and start reading other books, you find out that everything is equally atrocious ... When you put the pieces together, it always comes out to capitalism. As

⁶⁹⁵ Philip Stephens, 'Commentary', in *Blair's Britain, 1997-2007*, ed. Anthony Seldon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 639–44.

⁶⁹⁶ Anthony Seldon, 'The Net Blair Effect, 1994-2007', in *Blair's Britain, 1997-2007*, ed. Anthony Seldon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶⁹⁷ Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London.

⁶⁹⁸ Lunghi.

many people realise, you can't fight one aspect in isolation. You have to take on the totality.⁶⁹⁹

With time, and through readings, Barry came to see himself as a 'class-struggle anarchist', which is often used as either a hypernym or synonym of anarchist communist – a definition preferred by the Barese activist Arcangelo. Tim – another Kebele activist and self-defined class-struggle anarchist – explained: 'Some people call it anarcho-communism – there's lots of different terms, but I quite like "class-struggle anarchism". Keep out the word "communist" [laughs]. It has such a negative impact in this country'.⁷⁰⁰ This marks a main difference with Barry's Italian contemporaries. In Italy, the communist tradition is so strong that Arcangelo's post-USSR generation preserved their communist identity. In fact, they simply marked their distance from authoritarian communism by putting 'anarchist' before 'communist'. Whereas, the British stigma of 'communism' led Tim and Barry to prefer the term 'class-struggle' over 'communist'.

Like Arcangelo, Barry re-appropriated a term belonging to the history of the anarchist movement. This type of anarchism shares the communist view of the world as a struggle between classes – namely the bourgeoisie and the working class – and sees a social revolution as the way forward towards an anarchist society. However, as the American anarchist communist Wayne Price explained in 2007, class-struggle anarchism identifies capitalism as the common cause of all issues – from patriarchy to environmental disasters.⁷⁰¹ Hence, when Barry called himself a class-struggle anarchist, he went beyond the traditional scope of anarchist communists:

For me, a fight for anarchy is a fight for a better world based not on domination and competition and massive inequality – the world that we see today, where there's a tendency to see capitalism as the only option – to me it's a world based on equality, mutual respect, cooperation, people sharing resources and being good to each other and to the planet that supports us.⁷⁰²

His vision of an anarchist world encompassed – for instance – a respect for the environment ('people sharing resources and being good to each other and to the planet that supports us') that is not traditionally part of class-struggle anarchism. This view reflected a comeback of Murray Bookchin's ideas within the English-speaking libertarian movement, as several of his books were printed or re-printed between the late-1990s and mid-2000s. In particular, Barry's vision mirrors Bookchin's idea of social ecology, which identified socio-economic structures and relations – especially those of capitalism – as the main cause of the world's ecological problems.⁷⁰³ As the anarchist scholar Tom Cahill wrote when Bookchin died in 2006, 'by the time the younger 'new anarchists' grew up, in the eighties and nineties, the ideas of Bookchin had become

⁶⁹⁹ Barry, Interview on Kebele.

⁷⁰⁰ Tim, Interview on Kebele.

⁷⁰¹ Wayne Price, 'What Is Class Struggle Anarchism?', The Anarchist Library, 2007, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/wayne-price-what-is-class-struggle-anarchism>.

⁷⁰² Barry, Interview on Kebele.

⁷⁰³ Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (London: Wildwood House, 1974), 31–54.

commonplace'.⁷⁰⁴ While direct action movements regained momentum in Britain, activists like Barry rediscovered practices and also theories of the anarchist tradition. Both in Britain and Italy, this process of rediscovery of the anarchist tradition did not simply re-propose past views, but adapted them to the challenges of their contemporary world. They adopted traditional terms – such as class-struggle anarchist or anarchist communist – that varied slightly depending on the perception and history of the national contexts. Despite this, the general tendency was to recover traditional currents of anarchism but – at the same time – to expand their scope introducing other themes such as environmentalism.

5. Multiple identity/ies: Deconstructing and reconstructing anarchism in the present day

This tendency has more recently developed into a heterogeneous and interconnected political vision that has substituted more traditional single-issue approaches. The result is a libertarian 'multiple identity' that embraces struggles ranging from historic issues like antifascism and anticapitalism, to newer themes such as antigenderism and antispecism. Urban anthropologist Pnina Werbner used the term 'multiple identities' in the context of immigration to Britain, as she noticed that 'players are recognised and recognise themselves as bearing multiple ethnic identities'. She distinguished it from Crenshaw's 'intersectionality' because she described the former as a 'valorisation of positive identities', whereas the latter has a negative meaning being connected to power dynamics.⁷⁰⁵ During my questions on their political identity, I noticed a similar attitude in my interviewees to recognise themselves as bearing multiple identities. Being aware that identities are fluid and ever-changing throughout life, I tried to isolate – where possible – the different stages with time-specific questions.

I thus noticed a process of progressive identity fragmentation and multiplication. Yes, some of the women I interviewed who were politically active in the 1970s did define themselves as feminist as well as anarchist or libertarian, such as Shelley Assiter or Pina Buttiglione. Whereas, later libertarians gradually added new frames of identity or identification in the following years: anarcho-syndicalist and vegetarian; or anarcho-punk, vegan, and queer. My impression is that libertarians have now developed a rich and complex combination of political identities. This has generated two separate attitudes in the way libertarians self-identify politically. Many expressed a clear intolerance of any overarching political identity, and often preferred to list their multiple identities (feminist, antifascist, and so on). They often opposed any 'labels', which they usually saw as too narrow or divisive or old-fashioned. Others seemed more in line with Barry's position. They reinterpreted anarchism as an all-encompassing identity – a multiple identity that includes a variety of struggles like antifascism or antiracism.

⁷⁰⁴ Tom Cahill, 'Murray Bookchin (1921-2006)', *Anarchist Studies* 14, no. 2 (2006): 163–66.

⁷⁰⁵ Pnina Werbner, 'Everyday Multiculturalism: Theorising the Difference between "Intersectionality" and "Multiple Identities"', *Ethnicities* 13, no. 4 (August 2013): 401–19.

The trend towards multiple political identities (or identity) was helped by the socio-political context of the 2010s, characterised by a new wave of protests and direct actions on a variety of themes. Globally, protesters mostly criticised the mainstream political and economic models, which they perceived as undemocratic and unfair (Arab Spring, Spanish Indignados, Greek anti-austerity mobilisations, Occupy Movement).⁷⁰⁶ Many libertarians participated in the national versions of these movements against neoliberalism and in favour of direct democracy. Additionally, within these movements – especially Occupy – protesters carried on reflecting on a variety of other aspects, and including direct reference to intersectionality. They openly addressed the issue of race, class and gender privileges.⁷⁰⁷ British and Italian libertarians also mobilised around a series of other local themes, such as anti-fracking and solidarity with the Calais migrants in Britain, and No TAV (high-speed train) and antifascism in Italy. Contemporary activists are thus involved in multiple and overlapping campaigns that enrich and shape their political identity and networks.

5.1 Carmen and Tony: Deconstructing anarchism with hybrid and fluid identities

Practices and direct actions have always been central to the people involved in libertarian spaces. What varied in the past fifty years is the relationship between libertarians and theoretic-political reflection. Single-issue campaigns or concrete needs were often the gateway into libertarian activism, but then actions led to theoretical readings and debates, which in turn informed later actions. An example is the recovery of the Platform and other theoretical documents by the Barese anarcho-communists in the 1970s. Looking for causes behind the failed ‘revolution’ of 1968, they studied the history of the anarchist movement, and applied some rediscovered principles – like organisational dualism – to their practice. This attitude towards theoretical reflections clearly varied at different times and in different spaces. For instance, Italy presented a scenario in the 1970s that was much more oriented towards political elaboration than in Britain; and many punks privileged action over theory in the 1980s and 1990s. Still, a dialogue between practice and a theoretical reference-point existed, although maybe mediated by music, as many punks came to see themselves as anarcho-punks. Many libertarians now seem to disregard as secondary – or even as an obstacle – any reference to overarching theoretical frameworks. In fact, most of the interviewees in their late-20s and early-30s – who had become involved in libertarian communities in the late-2000s or early-2010s – seemed particularly wary of any political ‘label’.

⁷⁰⁶ Eduardo Romanos, ‘Collective Learning Processes within Social Movements. Some Insights into the Spanish 15-M/Indignados Movement’, in *Understanding European Movements*, ed. Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 203–19; Vittorio Sergi and Markos Vogiatzoglou, ‘Think Globally, Act Locally? Symbolic Memory and Global Repertoires in the Tunisian Uprising and the Greek Anti-Austerity Mobilizations’, in *Understanding European Movements*, ed. Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 220–35; Anna Szolucha, *Real Democracy in the Occupy Movement: No Stable Ground* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁷⁰⁷ Books Inc, ‘Occupy Intersectionality: Race, Class, & Gender’, Meetup, 2012, <https://www.meetup.com/PoliticallyInspired/events/58339822/>.

Carmen from Ex-Caserma Liberata social centre in Bari expressed this position with lucidity:

I think that the old definitions are meaningless, nowadays. Marxist-Leninist, anarchist, libertarian – they clearly have a meaning, but I came into active politics following practices, not ideologies. My only ideology is that I'm against the capitalist system. Period. So, I define myself an anticapitalist. Surely, antisexist, too. Then, antifascist, and obviously antiauthoritarian, antiracist, and all that. This is my political definition. Because, in my opinion, our battle is not an ideological battle – it's a cultural battle ... to make people understand that they can live a different life, that they must re-take control over their own time and spaces. So, they must free themselves from the capitalist brainwashing, like the idea that you must live to work or that your social recognition depends on how much money you own.⁷⁰⁸

Carmen described as 'meaningless' the definitions of the historical radical Left ('Marxist-Leninist, anarchist, libertarian') because she perceived them as detached from present-day 'active politics'. Rather than using those terms, she preferred instead to list the various identities composing her multifaceted politics: anticapitalist, antisexist, antifascist, antiauthoritarian and antiracist. She deemed them more useful for her 'cultural battle'. A reason for this could come from my interview to another activist of Ex-Caserma: Tony, who stated: 'I'm against any definition ... what counts are the practices and the presence of people willing to do politics and to participate in a self-managed space. I think that by defining myself I could shut myself in a structure that doesn't allow this'.⁷⁰⁹ Both Tony and Carmen highlighted the way they prioritise practices and actions over theories and definitions. They feared that by giving themselves a political label, they could scare away future possible activists and local residents.

'Anticapitalist' or 'antifascist' nevertheless endure as two 'labels' that are very charged politically, raising the question of why an umbrella term like anarchist/libertarian might not still have some value. Tony replied that he did not recognise himself in 'antispecism', even though many anarchists (especially in Italy) would not see antispecism as a tenet of anarchism. Carmen argued: 'I'm certain we must tear down this capitalist power system, but I'm not sure about the possible alternative ... I definitely imagine self-governing communities, but I don't think we can call that anarchism'. Even though self-governing communities are at the very heart of anarchism. She then added: 'To me, anarchism is a society where people don't decide collectively. I see it as something in which there's no real organisation'.⁷¹⁰ I found this very interesting because their perception of anarchism reflected their personal experiences of it – the beliefs and behaviours of the people they had come in contact with. Those who saw themselves as anarchists at Ex-Caserma were mostly self-declared 'individualists' – a stable presence on the Italian anarchist scene since the late nineteenth century. They developed as what historian Nunzio Pernicone called 'an evolutionary offshoot of the antiorganizationalist current, a spontaneous mutation amounting to a

⁷⁰⁸ Carmen and Tony, Interview on Bari social centres.

⁷⁰⁹ Carmen and Tony.

⁷¹⁰ Carmen and Tony.

new breed'. Not related to famous individualists like Max Stirner and Benjamin Tucker, these Italian individualists often engaged in individual acts of violence – the so-called propaganda by the deed.⁷¹¹ As a consequence, Carmen and Tony, who are more oriented towards forms of social activism, disregarded anarchism as a negative concept. Having to coexist and cooperate with those self-identifying anarchist comrades, they all sought consensus on individual shared identities such as anticapitalism and antifascism. From what I have noticed in other contemporary libertarian communities – both in Britain and in Italy – what happened in Ex-Caserma is representative of the wider contemporary scenario. In a period of multiple political identities and renewed state repression (restrictions on squatting in Britain, and increased controls on activists in Italy) libertarian spaces are attracting heterogeneous groups of activists. Together, they deconstruct the traditional identities of the radical Left to form new ones which are more hybrid and fluid.

5.2 Jo and Michael: Reconstructing (post)anarchism as a multi-identitarian framework

Jo and Michael (both pseudonyms) are two British activists, respectively in their mid-20s and early-30s, who are currently involved in Kebele social centre in Bristol. When I discussed their political self-identification with them, they started from the same premises as Carmen and Tony, but then came to very different stances. Jo claimed: 'I don't identify strongly as being anything in particular. [Politics] is not a huge anchoring point for my identity'.⁷¹² Like Tony, she played down the importance of identifying with a specific political definition. In addition, Michael shared Carmen's position regarding the priority of action over theory, as he said that his politics had been influenced 'definitely more [by] action than theory'. He then listed his political interests individually: anti-war and ecology, and more recently also migration, feminism and class politics.⁷¹³ What distanced Jo and Michael from Carmen and Tony is that, with some caveats, these two British activists called themselves anarchist.

Jo admitted that 'if pushed to answer [about my political identity] I would say I was an anarcho-feminist just for the ease of conversation. It's an umbrella term that might give people an idea of many smaller things that I might think or feel'.⁷¹⁴ She reacted to the awareness of the contemporary identitarian fragmentation of libertarians by proposing anarchism – or one its currents – as an 'umbrella term' that encompasses those 'many smaller things that [they] might think or feel'. Similar was the position of Michael, who argued:

I think I'm anarchist – at least very interested in anarchism: what it can teach us, how we can use it to analyse power relations in society, the way society works, and to come up with ways of working together to deconstruct those power relations and build more meaningful relations with each other and the planet we're on and everything.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹¹ Nunzio Perticone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Oakland-Edinburgh: Ak Press, 1993), 239.

⁷¹² Jo, Interview on Kebele.

⁷¹³ Michael, Interview on Kebele.

⁷¹⁴ Jo, Interview on Kebele.

⁷¹⁵ Michael, Interview on Kebele.

Rather than a full commitment to anarchism – as in the case of previous militants – Michael cautiously saw anarchism as a reference framework that could be helpful in analysing and deconstructing the *status quo*. He later added: ‘I’ve turned to lean towards green anarchism more than anything, but I try not to get into the traps of that. ‘Cause there’s aspects of green anarchism that are quite ableist, or that don’t challenge privilege. So, I’ve been trying to see where the edges are and cross over those edges and have more solidarity’.⁷¹⁶ Thus, Michael maintained a critical eye towards anarchism which, although useful to him, presented some limits, which he tried to overcome by traversing the edges of traditional anarchist currents.

A fundamental difference between the two groups of activists is their attitude towards anarchism. Even though Jo and Michael remained cautious, they did not reject the term, and in fact identified themselves with two of its currents – anarcho-feminism and green anarchism. They also demonstrated a deeper knowledge of its core principles. A reason for this is that both came into contact with forms of social anarchism rather than individualism, since the latter is less common in Britain. Hence, they developed a more positive opinion of anarchism. For instance, Michael told me:

I got into anti-war stuff around 2003 – the invasion of Iraq and all of that – and the most visible people working on that was socialists, so I got in with them. But I ended up finding that their top-down way of doing things didn’t quite make sense to me, so I found myself reading around a lot more, reading Noam Chomsky. I got involved in a social centre in Nottingham, the Sumac centre, and actually that’s what got me into social centres originally – finding people there and thinking: ‘Oh, this makes a lot more sense. This is more collaborative, the way that we work together, and a lot less hierarchical’ ... From then on, I became more relying with anarchism as a political approach.⁷¹⁷

We have seen throughout the thesis that personal experiences – such as readings and encounters – are highly influential in the development of people’s identities. However, the context in which such experiences happen is also important, as this example illustrates. Such different attitudes towards anarchism enabled Jo and Michael to even reclaim anarchism as a useful umbrella term to encompass their multiple political identities, and as a helpful framework to analyse society. They yet struggled with the limitations imposed by pre-existing definitions such as anarcho-feminism and green anarchism. The two activists only adopted them because of the lack of terms that would more accurately reflect the complex political identities of present-day libertarians.

The attitude of all four activists reflects what several authors describe as postanarchism (or post-anarchism). Postanarchism is a term that started circulating in the 2000s and has gained increasing currency among scholars and activists.⁷¹⁸ The journal *Anarchist Studies* has dedicated several articles to the topic, and even a monothematic issue in 2008. In one editorial, political

⁷¹⁶ Michael.

⁷¹⁷ Michael.

⁷¹⁸ Jason Adams, ‘Postanarchism in a Nutshell’, The Anarchist Library, 2003, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jason-adams-postanarchism-in-a-nutshell>.

theorist Saul Newman clarified that ‘postanarchism refers to a wide body of theory ... which attempts to explore new directions in anarchist thought and politics ... [by taking] account of new theoretical directions and cultural phenomena, in particular, postmodernity and poststructuralist’. It is in fact to the latter terms that the ‘post’ in post-anarchism refers to. Newman explained: ‘postanarchism does not understand *post* to mean being ‘after’ anarchism, but *post* in the sense of working at and extending the limits of anarchist thought by uncovering its heterogeneous and unpredictable possibilities’.⁷¹⁹ According to an article appeared the same year on the online archive *The Anarchist Library*, this ‘is an attitude that one adopts – many times without realizing it – ... that spits in the face of tradition and produces a heightened desire for experimentation in order to approach the freedom of the individual from the clutches of orthodoxy’.⁷²⁰ Furthermore, Scholar Duane Rousselle hypothesised in 2013 the existence of three periods to postanarchism, and claimed that in the third phase (the ‘*After* to postanarchism’) people ‘will not take such care with attempts at identification’.⁷²¹ From what emerged from my interviews, this third phase is here. Consciously or not, libertarians have become increasingly intolerant of traditional (anarchist) interpretations. They have begun experimenting to extend the boundaries in order to include new ‘heterogeneous and unpredictable possibilities’ regardless of political identities.

6. Conclusion

In the past five decades, the identity of libertarians has changed across different times and spaces. It adapted or reacted to them in a continuous dialogue with the ever-changing socio-political contexts. Temporally, the identities of libertarians varied greatly since the late 1960s, when masses of young people and the spreading of new social movements rejuvenated anarchism with new themes. Anarchism became popular among the young ‘revolutionaries’, who turned to historical anarchist figures to understand their world. Around the same time, the ‘natural anarchism’ of the countercultures – like hippie and punk movements – produced new libertarian identities. These were less rooted in the anarchist tradition, but equally influential to the anarchist movement. Further changes in the political identity of libertarians came after the fall of the Soviet Union, as activists reconsidered anarchism as a libertarian alternative to authoritarian communism, and both rediscovered and reinterpreted traditional anarchist thinkers. All this was followed by the current phase in which the hybridisation of the anarchist/libertarian identity has reached the point of such heterogeneity that many libertarians renounced or qualified all political definitions.

⁷¹⁹ Saul Newman, ‘Editorial: Postanarchism’, *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 101–6.

⁷²⁰ Saint Schmidt, ‘Postanarchism Is Not What You Think: The Role of Postanarchist Theory After the Backlash’, *The Anarchist Library*, 2008, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/saint-schmidt-postanarchism-is-not-what-you-think-the-role-of-postanarchist-theory-after-the-ba>.

⁷²¹ Duane Rousselle, ‘Postanarchism and Its Critics: A Conversation With Saul Newman’, *Anarchist Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013): 78.

Geographer Doreen Massey highlighted the interconnectedness of space and time – she spoke in fact of space-time, as I have illustrated in Chapter Two.⁷²² As space cannot be separated from history, time-related changes have a direct effect on space. In addition, Massey explained that identities are shaped through practices of interaction within the space-time frame.⁷²³ Hence, it is possible to isolate some predominant types of identities within certain spatial contexts. For instance, the Italian and British socio-political contexts nurtured the development of two different predominant types of libertarian identity – more political in Italy, and more countercultural in Britain. Moving from an international to a local level, it is possible to appreciate another type of space-related identity variation. For example, both Carolyn and Bibi were squatters in late-1980s early-1990s London. However, only the former developed an anarchist identity. One of the reasons for this is that Carolyn was also an integral part of the 121 Centre, which was a social centre with a strong anarchist influence. Bibi meanwhile claimed she would not usually discuss politics with her housemates, since they saw politics as ‘uncool’. Although I consider both social centres and squats as libertarian communities, social centres offer more possibilities for the enhancement of a political awareness by usually hosting political events and debates.

Within such spaces, the networks and relations that arose between libertarians facilitated the development of collective identities. Investigating the new social movements, sociologists Suzanne Staggenborg and Howard Ramos thus described ‘collective identity’: ‘the sense of shared experiences and values that connects individuals to movements and gives participants a sense of “collective agency”’.⁷²⁴ Political theorist Chantal Mouffe confirmed that radical citizens tend to elaborate a common identity, a ‘we’ opposed to a ‘them’. However, she underlined that theirs ‘is not a homogenous “we” ... [It is] a type of commonality ... that does not erase plurality and differences and that respects diverse forms of individuality’.⁷²⁵ This is why the political identities of libertarians presented elements of difference even within the same communities. Exemplary is the case of Gennaro and Arcangelo from Fucine Meridionali social centre – the former a self-defined ‘libertarian’, and the latter an ‘anarcho-communist’. A characteristic that has become more prominent in the recent years due to the increased heterogeneity of identities within the libertarian movement. In fact, these identities changed not only collectively, but also on an individual level. Political scientist Nathan Teske affirmed that the constant behind the construction of political activists’ identity is that they ‘strive to become the kind of persons they admire and want to be’.⁷²⁶ However, the way in which their identity is articulated takes different forms in different life period. Most interviewees openly admitted their own political identity had varied throughout their life. London-based activist Alessio Lunghi told me: ‘I’ve always been

⁷²² Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 249–69.

⁷²³ Massey, ‘Space, Time and Political Responsibility in the Midst of Global Inequality’, 92, 94.

⁷²⁴ Suzanne Staggenborg and Howard Ramos, *Social Movements*, Third edition (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2016), 28–29.

⁷²⁵ Chantal Mouffe, ‘Citizenship and Political Identity’, *The Identity in Question* 61, no. October (1992): 31, 32.

⁷²⁶ Nathan Teske, *Political Activists in America. The Identity Construction Model of Political Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 121.

within the anarchist movement growing up. Lately, I'm more towards a libertarian communist understanding of the world'.⁷²⁷ Whereas, 46-year-old Vito – a communard at Urupia commune in Italy – said he nowadays sees himself as 'a libertarian [after] a journey that began at 23-24'.⁷²⁸ Also, Michael from Kebele social centre in Bristol, started as a socialist and is now an anarchist. His political identity is, he said: 'A long journey that's always changing'.⁷²⁹

Be it spatially or temporally, collectively or individually, this chapter has shown that the identities of post-1968 libertarians have been just such 'a long journey that's always changing'. This is in line with Stuart Hall's argument regarding cultural identities – he explained that rather than 'an already accomplished fact, ... cultural identity [is] a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted'. He defined identity as a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being', within a historical process of 'constant transformation'.⁷³⁰ The same can be said of the political identity and identification of libertarians/anarchists, who are constantly producing their identity by constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing the libertarian/anarchist identity. In this constitutive process, the libertarian/anarchist identity itself resulted as 'always in process, and always constituted' – fluid. The libertarian nature of anarchism has always preserved it from dogmas, and opened it to new interpretations. This is why the libertarian/anarchist identity has always been fluid. In fact, its fluidity is what allowed it to adapt to different spaces and times, and survive. It embodies – and even pre-dated – the liquidity envisioned by Zygmunt Bauman in present-day society.⁷³¹ The identity crisis of contemporary libertarians reflects the broader identity crisis characterising our 'liquid modernity'. Yet, the historical fluidity of the libertarian/anarchist identity shows us that this is but a phase towards a new transformation that will ensure anarchism a continuing role within the radical movement.

⁷²⁷ Lunghi, Interview on social centres in London.

⁷²⁸ Vito, Interview on Urupia.

⁷²⁹ Michael, Interview on Kebele.

⁷³⁰ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.

⁷³¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

Conclusions

This research was a real journey of discovery for me. It started as a different project. I initially wanted to trace variations in libertarian communities over the past fifty years, concentrating especially on how their internal organisation and composition changed. The focus of my thesis gradually shifted as new themes emerged through my interviews and visits. Each of the testimonies I had the privilege to listen to opened a door on hidden life stories of activism and brought new perspectives on the everyday politics of communities that history has tended to overlook. I was amazed by the number of people who were ignorant of the existence of communities that, in most cases, involved hundreds of people in their lifespan. I, for one, had never heard of the Giungla social centre in Bari before starting my research, even though I was born and raised in that city. Many other people I spoke with – including academics and activists – were similarly unaware of such experiments of ‘anarchy in action’. At a conference, somebody questioned the existence of anarchist communes claiming that anarchists are against cooperation. Activists meanwhile frequently either idealised or overlooked such communal experiences.

The ephemeral nature of libertarian communities was not the only surprise of my research journey, though. In fact, each chapter revolves around a personal epiphany, beginning with the role of libertarian communities as radical hubs within the radical Left (Chapter One). This challenged the conservative clichés that I imbibed as I grew up and which depicted rural communes as reservoirs for utopian hippies detached from reality and social centres as hideouts for junkies or hooligans. By visiting some of these places and talking with people involved I noticed that they had been providing important services to both the local community and the wider radical movement. In 1976, for instance, Milanese anarchist militants squatted the buildings that later became the Conchetta social centre in order to house local working-class families, to provide a meeting space for various activist groups, and to host cultural and social initiatives for all. This brought me to reflect on how communities varied across different spatial and temporal contexts, and I came to see libertarian experiments as fluid processes (Chapter Two). They influence and are influenced by their constitutive elements – space, place and people – but are not delimited by any space/place or group of people in particular. As such, they can potentially survive eviction or defection. An example of this is the foundation of Ex-Caserma Liberata social centre in Bari in 2014. It was opened when three different collectives (Ex-Socrate, Villa Roth, and anarcho-punks from Andria) converged. Earlier (in 2011) Villa Roth had united a collective from a previous social centre (Ex-Mercato) and homeless families. Libertarian social centres in Bari were opened and evicted/closed in ebbs and flows.

This made me come back to the persistence – or lack of persistence – of memories of these spaces. I had seen directly that libertarian communities often left no trace of their existence behind in the mainstream. In addition, though, younger generations of activists often conserved little or no memory of their forebears. This was what in part led me to conclude that in some

respects libertarians live and perceive time differently from the mainstream – existing in a ‘libertarian time’ (Chapter Three). Many have a ‘queer’ idea of time which eschews and opposes the capitalist concept of time as a unit of measurement translating work into money. The precariousness that characterised many communities made libertarians ‘live in the present’, and value fun time over punctuality and productivity. Mainstream temporalities yet impinge: It was common for people involved in libertarian communities to quit because ‘activism time’ conflicted with family or work time. Further ‘revelations’ followed as I explored the pervasiveness of mainstream ideas and practices in the everyday life of libertarians (Chapter Four). Even though libertarian communities have been deeply rooted in egalitarianism and anti-authoritarianism, I noticed that forms of gender, ‘race’ and class privilege survived. I naively expected libertarian communities to be the embodiment of those libertarian societies making up the federations of communities envisioned by anarchist authors from Kropotkin to Bookchin (Introduction). Being born and raised in mainstream society meant that some libertarians replicated – maybe involuntarily – discriminatory, dominating or oppressive behaviours. Although usually ‘safer’ than mainstream society, many communities felt the need to develop ‘safer spaces’ policies to explicitly challenge these behaviours. Awareness of such issues has progressively increased among libertarians – especially in Britain. In addition, parts of the wider radical movement – like the eco-anarchist organisation Earth First! – have started seeing these behaviours as interconnected. They adopted Crenshaw’s concept of ‘intersectionality’ as a tool to form coalitions between groups subject to discrimination or domination.

Crenshaw’s identity-based discourse on discrimination led me to my last surprise – the variety and fluidity of libertarians’ political self-identification (Chapter Five). While I expected the people involved in libertarian spaces to see themselves as anarchist, I learned that such definitions varied across time and place. Though anarchistic in their daily practice, the British squatters I interviewed were usually less prone to self-identify as anarchists than the activists involved in social centres. By contrast, most of my Italian interviewees tended to claim their anarchist/libertarian identity. This changed with the younger generations, however. Although Italians have remained highly politicised, they progressively abandoned ‘classical’ definitions in favour of more composite ones (such as ‘feminist’ *and* ‘vegan’ *and* ‘queer’). This mirrored the *Zeitgeist*: this younger generation had experienced new social movements and subcultures which deconstructed and enriched older class-based identities. Italian libertarians seemed slower than the British in opening themselves to some of these ideas – notably in relation to veganism/antispécism, which Italian interviewees and anarchist press have started debating only very recently.⁷³² In addition, my interviews suggested that a further shift has been emerging in the

⁷³² When I interviewed some Ex-Caserma Liberata activists in 2014, they confirmed they had only just begun a collective reflection on the theme of veganism/antispécism. The debate is new and ongoing on the anarchist press, see for example: Silvia Papi, ‘Antispécismo/ La Caduta Degli Dèi’, *A-Rivista Anarchica*, May 2017, <http://www.arivista.org>; Nicholas Tomeo, ‘Anarchici E Anarchiche, vi Stiamo Parlando Della Lotta Di Classe! Antispécismo E Lotta Allo Sfruttamento’, *Umanità Nova*, 1 October 2017.

way libertarians identify themselves: they have increasingly refused any political definition. This reflects a wider contemporary tendency to see identities as heterogeneous, fluid and divergent from traditional categorisations. Heterogeneity was in fact probably my biggest surprise. The communities I researched were so diverse that at times this undermined the possibility of making spatial and temporal comparisons. Although in a dialogical relation with the national *Zeitgeist*, each libertarian community reflected and reacted to local issues and to variations in its composition. This particular combination of factors, together with their precariousness and generally short lifespan, made abstractions and generalisations unhelpful in understanding variations in libertarian communities since 1968. If at first this seemed to me a limitation, ultimately it allowed me to zoom in on the particularities of daily life. By giving back a voice to the women and men involved, I tried to restore a historical dimension to libertarian communities. Such individual testimonies, when read against wider historical events within both the mainstream and the radical movement, often suggested nevertheless broader tendencies.

Major differences are evident when we compare pre- and post-1968 libertarian communities in Britain and Italy. During the so-called ‘classical anarchist’ period (1860s-1940s), urban radicals and workers gathered and experimented with libertarian social relations and collective structures in mutual-aid societies and clubs. Foreign radical immigrants and exiles played a fundamental role in fostering these communities in Britain. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, *case del popolo* appeared in Italy. These often functioned as anarchist/socialist model societies. These types of urban community pre-dated present-day social centres in their role as social, cultural and political hubs for the wider radical movement. Conversely, rural examples of libertarian communities were usually less politically influential and were generally opposed by the radical movement. This was particularly true in Italy, where the revolutionary movement was stronger and better organised. Most Italian radicals therefore preferred urban political involvement to communal life in the country. Key anarchist figures like Errico Malatesta and Pyotr Kropotkin accused such communities of depriving the radical movement of propagandists and revolutionary forces at a historical moment characterised by attempted and successful uprisings and revolutions. Some of these revolutionary moments did produce forms of libertarian societies based on networks of communities, as theorised by several libertarian authors such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin. Famous and influential examples were established in Makhnovist Ukraine (1917-21) and Revolutionary Spain (1936-39). They became part of the collective imagination of libertarians, and inspired the foundation of new communities after the 1960s countercultures revived the libertarian movement.

The post-1968 libertarian experiments I have investigated in this thesis present elements of continuity and innovation in relation to those of the classical anarchist period. As with Jewish immigrants and revolutionary exiles in late-nineteenth century, after 1968 foreign radicals were once again inspirational to British communities. An example of this influence was the 2004 opening in London of the first self-declared social centres – famous was the Ex-Grand Banks in

Tufnell Park. They deliberately and explicitly mimicked the Italian *centri sociali* – the main type of urban libertarian community in Italy since their appearance in the mid-1970s. British precursors of social centres had been the anarchist cafs and autonomous centres of 1980s and 1990s, and precedent and ongoing squatting communities. Unlike in Italy, whole squatted streets were relatively common in Britain. This was possible because of council ‘regeneration’ programmes that left entire zones empty for years, and because squatting residential property (in England and Wales) became a criminal offence only in 2012. Many Italian anarcho-punks moved to London in the 1980s and early-1990s and were influenced by the subcultural and squatting scenes there. Sub- and countercultures were in fact more developed in Britain than in Italy, whilst Italian libertarians generally remained more politicised than in the UK after 1968. An important difference between pre-1968 and contemporary communities is suggested by my analysis of Urupia’s relationship with the wider radical movement. Unlike the marginal and ostracised communes of the classical period, Urupia has been politically active and fully integrated in the libertarian movement. Despite their physical isolation and their limited relationship with the surrounding mainstream society, they managed to become a reference point for libertarians right across Italy and beyond. Each year hundreds of people spend periods ranging from one day to several months there, and Urupia communards participate in political initiatives across Italy. Talking with anarchists both in Bari and Milan, I had the impression that Urupia is generally appreciated and sometimes idealised. Thus, both urban *and* rural communities developed the ability to function as hubs for the radical movement.

Kebele social centre in Bristol experienced the same difficulties as Urupia in connecting with the surrounding community. Its activists showed a sense of frustration at the lack of participation and involvement of the local Easton population in the social centre. Developing the political awareness of the nearby working-class and ethnic minority communities was one of their explicit objectives. Yet, like Urupia, Kebele’s community success has been elsewhere: it has become a key reference point not only within the radical scene in Bristol but also across Britain. In the mid-1990s, Kebele organised Reclaim The Streets street-party actions across Bristol and in 2015 they promoted the revival of the British Social Centre Network.⁷³³ The cases of Urupia and Kebele show that libertarian communities can sometimes be disconnected from physically proximate residents, but have a wider role in supporting and connecting the wider movement on local, national and even international levels. It is especially because of this role that the mainstream institutions have often contrasted and repressed such spaces. Libertarian communities like Ex-Caserma Liberata, Frestonia, Kebele and Urupia will nevertheless keep challenging the *status quo* by embodying alternative and oppositional examples of ‘anarchy in action’. Like voluntary heterotopias, they will equivocally represent, contest and invert the mainstream.

⁷³³ ‘Social Centres Network Gathering’, *Social Centre Network* (blog), 20 September 2015, <https://socialcentre.org.uk/>.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview consent form

Information sheet

Department of History, Classics and Archaeology
BIRKBECK
University of London
Malet Street,
London WC1E 7HX
020 7631 6000



Title of Study: Anarchist heterotopias: Post-1968 libertarian communities in Britain and Italy

Name of researcher: Luca Lapolla

The study is being done as part of my PhD degree in the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology, Birkbeck, University of London. The study has received ethical approval. This study wants to explore the form and role of libertarian communities after 1968.

If you agree to participate you will agree a convenient time and place for me to interview you for about an hour. You are free to stop the interview and withdraw at any time.

A code will be attached to your data so it remains totally anonymous.

The analysis of our interview will be written up in a report of the study for my degree. You will not be identifiable in the write up or any publication which might ensue.

The study is supervised by Prof. Matt Cook who may be contacted at the above address and telephone number.

Room 203, 26 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DQ. Tel: 020 7631 6680

Consent form

I have been informed about the nature of this study and willingly consent to take part in it.

I understand that the content of the interview will be kept confidential.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I am over 16 years of age.

Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Copy for the participant.

Appendix 2 – Semi-structured interview schedule (first version)

INTERVIEWEE

- Name (pseudonym), age, origin, city of residence
- Would you define yourself as an anarchist? (Which tendency)
- How and when did you become an anarchist?
- Has your way to understand anarchism changed? Which anarchist thinker influenced you the most?
- Do you live (or have you ever lived) in an anarchist community? [rural commune, urban squat/social centre]. Why?
- How did you become involved in it? (When did you leave? why?)

THE COMMUNITY

Foundation: when and how?

- What were (are) the objectives?

Members: how many people live(d) there? Changes since the foundation?

- Cause for leaving?
- Geographical / social / political origin? age?

Internal structure: assembly? Collectives?

- Decision making?
- Daily life? (shifts / division of labour / personal properties / money)
- Organisation of initiatives: local/national/international? Participation

Relationships:

- Institutions (state, police, school, local councils...)
- Local area (local community, neighbours) participation?
- Anarchistic groups (nationally and internationally)
- Other communities/communes/social centres/ co-ops (nationally and internationally)

Appendix 3 – Semi-structured interview schedule (final version)

INTERVIEWEE

- Name (pseudonym), age, origin, city of residence, profession, studies
- How would you define yourself politically?
- What is anarchism for you?
- (How and when did you become an anarchist? Which tendency? Reference points?)
- Have you changed your point of view on this? Why?

- Have you ever been involved in a libertarian community? [rural commune, urban squat/social centre]. Which one/s?
- How did you become involved in it? (When did you leave? Why?)

THE COMMUNITY

Foundation: when and how?

- What were (are) the objectives?
- Theoretical/practical inspiration and reference points?

Members: how many people live(d) there? Changes since the foundation?

- Cause for leaving?
- Geographical / social / political origin? Age?
- Internal relationships (sex, gender, class, ethnic origins)?

Internal structure: assembly? Collectives? Co-ops?

- Decision making?
- Daily life? (shifts / division of labour / personal properties / contributions / vegan)
- Organisation of initiatives: local/national/international? Participation

External relationships:

- Institutions (state, police, school, local councils...)
- Local area (local community, neighbours). Participation/involvement?
- Anarchic groups (nationally and internationally) or social movements
- Other communities/communes/social centres/co-ops (nationally and internationally)